

The Inquisitor in the Hat Shop

Inquisition, Forbidden Books and Unbelief in Early Modern Venice

Federico Barbierato

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To the memory of Giuseppe Del Torre

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in Early Modern Venice

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First published 2012 by Ashgate Publishing

Published 2016 by Routledge

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Barbierato, Federico, 1972–

The inquisitor in the hat shop : Inquisition, forbidden books and unbelief in early modern Venice.

1. Inquisition–Italy–Venice. 2. Censorship–Italy–Venice–History–16th century. 3. Censorship–Italy–Venice–History–17th century. 4. Trials (Heresy)–Italy–Venice–History–16th century. 5. Trials (Heresy)–Italy–Venice–History–17th century. 6. Venice (Italy)–Social conditions–To 1797. 7. Venice (Italy)–Church history–16th century. 8. Venice (Italy)–Church history–17th century. 9. Venice (Italy)–History–1508–1797.

I. Title

272.2'0945311-dc22

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Barbierato, Federico, 1972–

The Inquisitor in the hat shop : Inquisition, forbidden books, and unbelief in early modern Venice. p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 978-1-4094-3547-1 (hardcover : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-1-4094-3548-8 (ebook)

1. Inquisition–Italy–Venice–History. 2. Censorship–Italy–Venice. 3. Booksellers and bookselling–Italy–Venice. 4. Prohibited books–Italy–Venice. 5. Venice (Italy)–Church history–16th century. 6. Venice (Italy)–Church history–17th century. I. Title.

BX1723.B37 2011

272'.20945311-dc23

2011029464

ISBN 978-1-409-43547-1 (hbk)

ISBN 978-1-315-55673-4 (ebk)

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Everything must be logical, everything must be understood, both in history and in men's minds; but there is still a gap between one and the other, a dark area where collective motives become individual motives, forming monstrous deviations and unexpected combinations.

Italo Calvino, *The Path to the Spiders' Nests*

Curtis says, 'The point is that it's hard to know what to believe'.

Matthew says, 'No, the point is that there is a lot of stuff to believe'.

Mr Norman says, 'Isn't the point that you shouldn't believe anything?'

The waitress says, 'Aren't those all the same point?'

Chris Bachelder, *Bear v. Shark: The Novel*

The Captain had profound religious views, and their breadth equaled their profundity. He did not get his system from the pulpit, but thought it out for himself, after methods of his own.

Mark Twain, *Captain Simon Wheeler's Dream Visit to Heaven*

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Note on Citations and Abbreviations

More veneto dates have been adapted to the modern style, with the year beginning on 1 January rather than 1 March as was used in the Republic of Venice.

Archives and libraries

ACDF	Archivio della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, Città del Vaticano
ASBl	Archivio di Stato di Belluno
ASTO	Archivio di Stato di Torino
ASV	Archivio di Stato di Venezia
ASVat	Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Città del Vaticano
BAV	Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano
BMC	Biblioteca del Civico Museo Correr, Venezia

Printed publications

<i>DBI</i>	<i>Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani</i> (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia italiana, 1960–)
<i>DSI</i>	Adriano Prosperi (ed.), <i>Dizionario Storico dell'Inquisizione</i> (5 vols, Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2010)

Other abbreviations

b./bb.	<i>busta/e</i>
c./cc.	leaf/leaves
c./cc. n.n.	unnumbered leaf/leaves
ff.	following
ms./mss	manuscript/s
n./nn.	Note/s
<i>r.</i>	<i>recto</i>
reg.	<i>registro</i>

v.

verso

vol./vols

volume/volumes

Acknowledgements

I started the research for this book many years ago and there are lots of people that I should thank for their contributions and for standing by me through thick and thin. Chiara, Daria and Giovanni have always been there and have suffered the downside of my profession, albeit one which I am fortunate and privileged to practise. To cut a long story short, this book belongs to them as much as it does to me.

Many other people helped me in ways that they might not even imagine, but they should take my word for it that they did. Among others, I should mention Elena Bonora, Lodovica Braida, Nina Cannizzaro, Antonio Ciaralli, Mario Caricchio, Dino Carpanetto, Filippo De Vivo, Brendan Dooley, Sophie Houdard, Piero Lucchi, Simonetta Marin, Sabrina Minuzzi, Walter Panciera, Chiara Petrolini, Tiziana Plebani, Paolo Preto, Dorit Raines, Giuseppe Ricuperati, Gian Paolo Romagnani, Silvia Sebastiani, Gianvittorio Signorotto, Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci, Alessio Sopracasa, Antonio Trampus, Gian Maria Varanini, Fabiana Veronese, Alfredo Viggiano, Stefano Villani, John Visconti and Xenia von Tippelskirch. Frank Gordon was a patient and able translator: the text you are now reading is undoubtedly an improvement on the Italian version. Maddalena Merlin and Giulia Modena helped me to prepare the text for printing. I would like to thank the editorial staff at Ashgate who made the production of this book a smooth process, in particular Tom Gray for believing in this project promptly, and my editors, Lianne Sherlock and Jon Lloyd: they read the text deeply and really improved it, and have been more than patient with me and with my thoughtlessness.

The Department of Time, Space, Image and Society (TeSIS) at the University of Verona provided me with an ideal environment for exchanging views with colleagues from other disciplines. Without my students I would probably have finished this book – and others – sooner, but I am grateful to them because I feel that I have learnt much more than I was able to teach them.

Antonella Barzazi and Paolo Ulvioni not only read the text patiently when it was still a PhD thesis some 300 pages longer but also discussed it and underlined some of its strengths and weaknesses, taking the trouble to reassure an author who is often an inherent stranger to enthusiasm. They were also kind enough to offer me the benefit of their expertise whenever I needed it.

Corrado Pin gave me the best teaching I could have hoped for about Sarpi, the Sarpian tradition and much more besides: my current knowledge of this field is largely thanks to him. Maria Pia Donato kept herself busy as a systematic critic and often demolished certainties, although she did not always manage to do so. However, she always acted out of fondness and true friendship, and I am obliged to her for the many doubts that she raised, leading to new interpretations and fresh ideas. I am indebted to Jean Pierre Cavaillé, most of all because he offered me the opportunity to interact with one of the leading scholars in this field of research, but also for the suggestions and observations he shared with me, furthermore allowing me to view previously unpublished texts and preparatory material for his courses. I never fail to be surprised by the generosity and simplicity with which he did this. Since I wrote my thesis I have been able to rely on the readings, criticism and support of Giorgio Politi. I am grateful to him for many things, not least for having made a significant contribution to improving this volume and for his constant friendship. I have learnt many things from Filippo Benfante, Piero Brunello and Gigi Corazzol, and fortunately this learning process has not yet come to an end. Most of all they have taught me that there is no set formula for ‘thinking’ historically or writing about history. Adelisa Malena has provided a now established and essential ‘second point of view’ on my research and writings: without her help there would have often been little more than an empty bowl. Ottavia Niccoli and Alessandro Pastore read the text in full: their tips, doubts and rejections forced me to rethink it from scratch and have undoubtedly made it better, while their encouragement, constant expressions of interest and genuine affection put me in a position to be able to do so. It is hard to express enough gratitude to Alessandro Arcangeli for what he has done and his continued assistance through discussions, suggestions, translations, plans, help, hospitality and much more besides (by the way, my thanks also go out to Marion, Isabella, Imogen and Jacob). His daily presence, discretion and generosity have made many things simpler over the last few years. I can no longer recall how many versions, fragments of text, discussions, doubts and requests, both sensible and otherwise, put my friendship with Mario Infelise to the test over more than 15 years of research, interest and projects that we often shared. Although not commensurate to the debt, our mutual emotional restraint suggests that a simple thank you should suffice.

Foreword

Jean-Pierre Cavaillé (EHESS-Paris)

Without any doubt, this work by Federico Barbierato constitutes a decisive turning point in the study of the spread of irreligious (and more generally deviant) statements, attitudes and behaviour in the early modern age.

As a result of the way in which it started at the end of the seventeenth century in the pages of Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire* and then developed in the nineteenth century, the history of unbelief and free thinking has essentially been a history of intellectuals, based first of all on the study of printed books and clandestine manuscripts.¹ It has naturally also focused on their authors, with an increase in biographical studies, and in the best cases has strived to reconstruct the groups and networks of these practitioners of the written word: scholars, teachers, poets, journalists and so on.² This procedure produced the image of irreligiousness in the Ancien Régime as a rare phenomenon, marginal, strictly elitist and reduced to a clandestine existence by censorious practices. Completely isolated in a society which was hostile to their ideas and threatened by religious and secular powers alike, authors had to develop writing strategies which could only be deciphered by the initiated. This was necessary both to protect themselves from persecution and to stop their fellow citizens from having access to a message which even they recognized as a serious danger to public order.³ Indeed, as one branch of the history of mentalities has never tired of repeating, the 'masses' largely remained profound 'believers', extending the Epinal stereotype of medieval crowds chained to their faith up to the eve of the

¹ At the very least I should mention the work based on the recovery of sources by Frédéric Lachèvre, *Le libertinage au XVII^e siècle* (15 vols, Geneva: Slatkine, 1968), and, as far as clandestine literature is concerned, the pioneering work by Ira O. Wade, *The clandestine organization and diffusion of philosophical ideas in France from 1700 to 1750* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1938).

² The inevitable reference is to René Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle. Nouvelle édition augmentée* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1983). Martin Mulrow's more recent works are also noteworthy, putting forward the notion of a 'philosophical constellation'.

³ See in particular Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the art of writing* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988).

French Revolution and beyond.⁴ At most their superstitions were evoked, an evident sign of the persistence of a pre-logical mentality, and were capable of leading them to the worst excesses (witchcraft and the fight against it, magical practices and so on).

In this way historians drew heavily from Christian apologetics, vulgarized into the ‘Collier’s Creed’,⁵ but also subscribed to the representation of ‘the people’ as credulous and superstitious, the victims of their own imagination and passions, a depiction propagated by the ‘enlightened’ elite. Indeed, the total repudiation of the people, confining them within the categories of ignorance and superstition, was a fundamental element of the elitism of those who defined themselves as ‘shrewd’ and ‘cured of foolishness’ (*Naudeana*), wilfully revisiting the loose anthropology of Averroism whereby the difference between a wise man and the people is the same as the distinction that separates a real man from a portrait.⁶ One of the most frequently recurring scenes in so-called ‘libertine’ literature – whose value as a source is difficult to establish even when its content is entirely plausible – involves the ‘philosopher’ or sharp ‘wit’ threatened with a lynching by superstitious folk stirred to hatred (Talleyrand des Réaux, Cyrano de Bergerac, Dassoucy, etc.).

This had the effect of consolidating the image of the questioning of the dogma and doctrines of revealed religions with a mainly if not exclusively elite character. However, the existence of popular irreligiousness from medieval times onwards was undeniable for those such as Le Roy Ladurie who were familiar with the cases that filled the inquisitorial register kept by Bishop Fournier of Pamiers (early fourteenth century); they feature simple country folk, both men and women, who question the immortality of the soul, Mary’s virginity, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist among other issues.⁷

In his bold thesis, which clashed with Lucien Febvre’s highly influential work, François Berriot drew attention to the image of irreligiousness or religious indifference attributed to certain professions from the sixteenth

⁴ This image, still widespread today, is based above all on the notable work by Lucien Febvre, *Le problème de l’incroyance au xvi^e siècle. La religion de Rabelais* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1942).

⁵ On this matter see the important article by Alain Mothu, ‘De la foi du charbonnier à celle du héros (et retour)’, *Les dossiers du Grihl, Libertinage, athéisme, irréligion. Essais et bibliographie*, available online since 23 November 2008: <http://dossiersgrihl.revues.org/document3393.html>.

⁶ Luca Bianchi, ‘Filosofi, Uomini e bruti, note per la storia di un’antropologia averroista’, *Rinascimento*, 32 (1992): pp. 185–201.

⁷ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 à 1324* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); and above all Jean-Pierre Albert, ‘Hérétiques, déviants, bricoleurs’, *L’Homme*, 173 (2005): pp. 75–94.

century onwards: the most common suspects were soldiers, sailors, thieves, prostitutes, actors and even chimney sweeps.⁸ Although studies on poverty and marginality repeatedly accused ‘wretches’ and ‘poor scoundrels’ of living in a state of ‘libertinism’, a term used to refer as much to indifference and ignorance with regard to religion as moral debauchery, they never analysed it in depth.

Then Carlo Ginzburg published *The Cheese and the Worms*, wherein an inquisitorial body unmasked the life of a simple miller, Domenico Scandella, known as Menocchio, who lived in the second half of the sixteenth century. Menocchio had extremely limited cultural knowledge, having read very little and surrounded by a traditional backdrop of rural paganism, but managed to develop detailed reasoned critiques of all the pivotal principles of Christianity, replacing them with a materialistic cosmogony.⁹ He twice had the strength to sustain his thinking before the Court of the Inquisition, who sentenced him to burn at the stake.

It was thus possible to highlight both everything that linked Menocchio’s reasoning to the thinking developed by his most radical literary peers and everything that separated them, from the association of strong social denunciation to religious critique: the Church and priests ‘oppress the poor’, speak in Latin in Church and in court, which amounted to ‘betrayal of the poor’ and so on. One point in the major long-running discussion that followed the publication of the book focused on how representative Menocchio was: was he a unique isolated case or just one among a myriad of others, buried in the darkness of history?¹⁰ The Inquisition trial, published by Andrea Del Col,¹¹ showed that Menocchio’s ideas had undoubtedly been influenced by spending time with a painter called Nicola da Porcia, but he might also have ‘simply’ been influenced by Lutheran, Anabaptist or Anti-Trinitarian beliefs, which had stimulated others in the same area. Indeed, the evocation of these doctrines was enough to indicate the dynamic nature of the radicalization of religious criticism, which the Reformation opened up to embrace all restless spirits. In any case, we know that the miller convinced at least one person, an illiterate carpenter called Melchiorre

⁸ François Berriot, *Athéismes et athéistes au XVI^e siècle en France* (2 vols, Lille: Presses Universitaires de Lille, 1984), vol. 1, p. 195. On the ambiguity of the figure of the chimney sweep, see the cited article by Alain Mothu. With regard to popular irreligiousness see also Didier Foucault, *Histoire du libertinage. Des goliards au marquis de Sade* (Paris: Perrin, 2007).

⁹ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

¹⁰ See in particular ‘Uno, due, tre mille Menocchio?’, *Archivio Storico Italiano*, I (1979): pp. 51–87.

¹¹ Andrea Del Col, *Domenico Scandella detto Menocchio* (Pordenone: Edizioni Biblioteca dell’Immagine, 1990).

Gerbas. There was also talk of a peasant from Grisons, a certain Tuffo or Toffo, who blasphemed, did not believe in God or the saints and did not take part in religious services. After the miller was burnt at the stake, one witness spoke about a certain Marcato or Marco from Pordenone, who had no direct ties with Scandella but also denied the immortality of the soul. Ginzburg himself also drew attention to some other cases, such as Pellegrino Baroni, known as Pighino, another miller tried in 1570 by the Court of Ferrara, or Costantino Saccardino, a poor charlatan who in around 1617 in Venice treated ‘those who [...] believe’ in hell as ‘idiots’: ‘princes want us to believe it, because they want to do as they please. But now [...] the whole dovecote has opened its eyes.’¹²

As in the case of Menocchio, the example of Saccardino shows that the idea of the imposture of revealed religions spread right across the social spectrum and led to regular stirrings of rebellion.

Studies of the English Revolution, in particular the ones conducted by Christopher Hill, have highlighted the spread of this issue among so-called ‘radicals’, associated with the partial or complete questioning of Christian dogma, the notion of sin (the case of the Ranters) and sometimes even linked to a comprehensive challenge to private property (Winstanley and the Diggers).¹³ Most of these unruly spirits that rejected both the Anglican Church and its Presbyterian counterpart now belonged to the more modest lower social strata of society.

France offers a specific case in which popular irreligiousness is still a grey area due to the absence of Inquisition sources in the modern age, along with other legal evidence connected to them. It is difficult to give credence to Father Mersenne’s excessive estimates in his *Questions sur la Genèse* (1623) regarding the number of atheists in Paris (no fewer than 50,000), although it is true that the alarm was general and did not only concern intellectuals in apologetic writing. Therefore, the study of the popular spread of irreligious ideas and practices in Ancien Régime France is still waiting for its Ginzburg or Barbierato. It could be that like elsewhere these ideas, which obviously existed, were associated with violent anticlericalism. The curate Meslier – when speaking about popular irreligiousness, the lower clergy need to be taken into serious consideration – wrote a major treatise for his parishioners, who he wanted to address freely after his death; it was both ‘communist’ ahead of its time and

¹² Carlo Ginzburg, *Occhiacci di legno* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1998), p. 57. See, by the same author, ‘The Dovecote Has Opened Its Eyes’, in G. Henningsen and J. Tedeschi (eds), *The Inquisition in Early Modern Europe* (DeKalb ILL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), pp. 190–98.

¹³ In particular: *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Temple Smith, 1973).

strictly atheist (it is clear that the less-than-enviable social status of a curate in Etrépygny was a determining factor in the genesis of his egalitarian atheism). When he composed it, he remembered that ‘wish of a man a while back who had no culture or education, but who, to all appearances, did not lack the common sense to pass sound judgements [...] His wish was that all the rulers of the earth and all the nobles be hanged and strangled with the guts of the priests.’¹⁴ Meslier’s celebrated words thus drew on popular origins without revealing anything about the way in which he accessed them. However, his wording does allow glimpses into a world which is very different from the traditional image referred to by Christian apologetics and profane plays, with their figures of chimney sweeps and shepherds straight from a Christmas crib, poor people who would rather die of hunger than renounce the holy name of God and sanctimonious servants who make the sign of the cross when faced with their masters’ escapades.

Instead, Federico Barbierato’s work, which deals with the same period in which the curate Meslier lived, only serves to highlight the inadequacy and incompleteness of French studies, which all focus on the audacious feats of the elite. It also shows up the shortcomings of English studies, which mostly see the people’s indefatigable attachment to Christian values and principles as an indisputable fact, despite the crumbling of consensus within the confession. This is why this major study of forms of religious deviance in Venice between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is both incisive and epoch-making: it is a breakthrough in European history, which as a whole continues to see irreligious criticism as the sole reserve of the lettered elite (when it deigns to recognize the relevant manifestations). On the other hand, thanks to his complete knowledge of the Venetian Inquisition archives, Barbierato proves beyond any possibility of challenge the existence of an intense flow of irreligious practices and statements at all social levels in the Serenissima Republic during the period in question, in particular among the more humble professions: lower clergy, traders, craftsmen, porters, gondoliers, prostitutes and beggars to name but a few. In some way, as Barbierato writes, hundreds or even thousands of Menocchios dispensed their doubts and arguments with varying degrees of radicalness and coherence, sometimes combined with irony and sarcasm. They did this not in secret during reserved conventicles, but in taverns and *botteghe*, on bridges and in *campi* around Venice. However, the popular irreligiousness that emerges from this book swarming with accounts, verbal exchanges and episodes recounted as they happened (the sources allowed the author to see them in an oblique but extremely detailed way) is a world away from being a weak impoverished

¹⁴ Jean Meslier, *Testament. Memoir of the Thoughts and Sentiments of Jean Meslier* (Amherst NY: Prometheus Books, 2009), p. 37.

imitation of the elite's theoretical output. Although this form of irreligiousness was undoubtedly largely built on the same themes – the political imposture of religions, the denial of the immortality of the soul and divine providence, criticism of Christian sexual morality and so on – it was definitely not the result of diluting the philosophemes of learned literature. Instead, it presented itself as an inexhaustible source of original and reworked arguments, images and also court appearances, which often led to the formulation of statements that are much more direct, effective and conclusive than anything else that can be read in printed books; the publishing procedure and perhaps also the forms of university and scholarly arguments impose strict self-censorship on authors. Therefore Federico Barbierato's book is, *ipso facto*, a comprehensive rebuttal of the controversial thesis of the acculturation process implemented by the elite upon a consistently recalcitrant and backward people. In other words, the old one-way theory of acculturation is abandoned here in favour of focusing on the circular nature of the relationship between the hegemonic culture and subordinate cultures, to revisit one of Carlo Ginzburg's formulae. It is nevertheless attentive to the influence of social positions (whether or not someone belongs to a subordinate class) on the ongoing task of appropriating, reinterpreting and possibly even radicalizing the reasons, themes, theses and philosophemes in a form of irreligiousness with multiple roots, which feeds off immediate personal experience using elements taken both from oral culture and directly or indirectly from books. The content of this culture of irreligiousness is derived from multiple heterogeneous sources: the Venetians' traditional familiarity with Reformation ideas that penetrated Italy, the persecuted sects of Anabaptism and Antitrinitarianism, dissident forms of spirituality close to the Catholic world (in particular Quietism), as well as the culture of magic and the occult, which was both popular and learned, without forgetting the set of alternative philosophical and literary culture collected under the vague but somewhat pertinent name of naturalism.

The result of this heterogeneity of form and content, made up to a considerable extent by the result of the diversification of religious culture (itself crossed by confessional dissent and spiritual movements with varying degrees of heterodoxy), is individual and collective bricolage with sometimes surprising results, such as the frequent association between open incredulity and magical practices. In conclusion, it must be emphasized that Barbierato's book makes one other fundamental contribution: while the dissident or deviant culture it highlights contains some undeniably radical features, leading more than one protagonist to full-bodied atheism, it is also distinguished by its 'impurity' (at least in relation to the depictions which the history of free thinking has habitually offered), for example in the causality or fusion of spiritualist statements and

crypto-materialist ideas, associated when appropriate with blasphemous or magical practices.¹⁵

This book is therefore a pioneer in a new evolving trend of studies on the intersecting relations which wound their way around Europe in the early modern age and which connected forms of dissent that have traditionally only been studied by the history of religion – spiritualists, Antinomians, Anabaptists, Antitrinitarians and so on – to the tacit statement of crypto-materialist, sensualist, empiricist or Pyrrhonist doctrines.

Historians often come across indecipherable cases in which the traditional categories (for example those which define ‘spirituals’, ‘libertines’ or ‘naturalists’¹⁶) no longer seem to be pertinent. Furthermore, as Luca Addante recently found with regard to a major group of Waldensians, it is sometimes possible to describe the processes of radicalization which lead heterodoxy towards a more accomplished form of irreligiousness.¹⁷ Federico Barbierato’s book also invites us to reflect on the level of absorbency among currents of thought which should never have crossed paths – such as Quietism and libertinism, occultism and materialism or spiritualism and scepticism – through a wealth of concrete cases drawn from the Inquisition archives that seem to come to life. It is precisely thanks to this ‘close-up’ use of verbal exchanges narrated by witnesses that the cumbersome categories from the history of ideas and philosophy dissolve, demonstrating their limited use in grasping the transience, rapidity, agility and violence of the positions embodied in real people.

¹⁵ On this matter see another work by Federico Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli. Clavicula Salomonis e libri di magia a Venezia nei secoli XVII e XVIII* (Milan: Edizioni Sylvestre Bonnard, 2002). On the association of mystics, *alumbrados*, libertines and Rosicrucians under the same condemnation in France in the 1620s see Sophie Houdard, *Les Invasions mystiques. Spiritualités, hétérodoxies et censures au début de l’époque moderne* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2008).

¹⁶ This had already happened with what Calvin denounced under the name of ‘libertins’ (‘qui se nomment spirituels’), in 1545. The history of English religious and political dissent offers numerous similar cases. A good example is when the authors and popular activists were grouped together under the name *Ranters*.

¹⁷ Luca Addante, *Eretici e libertini nel Cinquecento* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2010).

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Preface

There was a popular ‘joke’ in Venice at the start of the eighteenth century about the extent to which attitudes of unbelief had entered the fabric of the city. It must have sounded something like this:

Do you know why in France, when they take the eucharist to a sick person, so few people go along, whereas in Venice, many go? Because in France God is among friends and among the faithful, so he has no worries about anything or any threat, and therefore he feels safe to go with such a slight accompaniment.

It was probably coined by Monsieur Hubert, a Frenchman who had no love lost for the Republic and was ‘inclined to use his speeches to direct his bile’ against the government.¹ A debate could certainly be opened regarding the lack of a need for an escort in France, and even more so with regard to how much such a joke can prove. However, the fact remains that although its content was exaggerated for reasons of controversy, it nonetheless expressed a widespread idea. The impression that Venice gave in the late sixteenth century of a place no longer ‘in harmony with the Counter-Reformation’² became even more marked in the following century. Those arriving in the city must have found a world characterized by different forms of heterodox unrest, which benefited from a plethora of opportunities to take hold, spread, expand and feed off each other. It was a world in which Counter-Reformation vigilance could not manage to hide the cracks in an unsettled concept of religiousness pervaded by doubt and often denied, a world in which elements of dissent borrowed from more organized heretical movements had the effect of strengthening the somewhat muddled and indefinable form of irreligiousness.

The aim of this book is to give, at least partly, some idea of the complexity of this environment and the heterodox discourse which typified it in the period running from approximately 1640 to 1740. While I was systematically analysing all the trials conducted at the Venetian Sant’Uffizio (Holy Office), I became curious about the nature of the depositions. From around the 1640s onwards they started to concentrate more on certain issues relating to the tradition of

¹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 627, report by G[iacomo] Roselli on 26 September 1707.

² Gaetano Cozzi, ‘Stato e Chiesa: un confronto secolare’, in *Venezia barocca. Conflitti di uomini e idee nella crisi del Seicento veneziano* (Venice: Il Cardo, 1995), pp. 247–87, at p. 267.

libertinism and unbelief. But this change in the nature of these documents was by no means a sudden one; according to records, similar episodes had been occurring since the middle of the previous century. What I felt had changed with respect to the past, however, was the frequency with which they occurred and the routine inclusion of even fairly radical ideas without any immediate reference to specific heretical movements. I was particularly struck by the way that the statements contained an amalgam of multiple references, sources and personal reflections, as well as what appeared to be a widespread willingness to render them public in a wide variety of contexts.

I was drawn to these circles from the word go, and besides having enjoyed myself in the reconstruction of events and statements – even if the term is not really an appropriate one with regard to events which were often anything but fun, especially in their outcome, for their reluctant protagonists – I felt that I could understand an important dimension of culture and society in the late seventeenth century and the first few decades of the eighteenth century. I therefore tried to understand the ways in which ideas spread, the reasons for the rapidity of exchanges and the concrete means of communication that led a not insignificant number of individuals to share their beliefs and doubts about Catholicism and religion in general. The result is a somewhat complex picture and moreover one which relates to a period of Venetian history that is still largely unknown, especially with regard to its characteristic expressions of religious dissent. This situation is at least partly connected to the difficulty in identifying common distinguishing features and naming them in keeping with traditional categories of non-conformism. From the late sixteenth century onwards it was no longer a question of a fight between orthodoxy and the Reformation; the fight was over and the clash had left a battlefield strewn with fragments of theories, ideas and convictions, which had, however, largely lost any reference to the Reformation context and had become autonomous entities. It is therefore difficult to label clearly as Calvinists all those who asserted that purgatory did not exist or suggested that confession was a matter for papal arbitration. Protests advocating opinions that differed from Catholicism were very often accompanied by considerations that were personal to varying degrees or by reworkings of others' thoughts, which by their very nature could not be inserted within the traditional rigid framework of interpretation.

Therefore, with regard to my chosen period, the problem did not seem to be identifying propositions or theories which inherently belonged to one or other heterodox tradition. Instead, it was more a question of seeing, for example, how a Lutheran cue could evolve, blend with different elements or contribute to creating a certain degree of irritation towards dogma and the authorities, or anything perceived as dominant and oppressive in morals and behaviour, and

finally mature into an incredulous, sceptical, unbelieving or libertine attitude along with all the associated meanings that the terms embody. There was a huge grey area in which heterodox unrest of different origins combined and where distinguishing features faded and blended into one another. It was not rare, for example, to embrace Calvinist doctrines but at the same time hold a materialist irreligious attitude. Even more frequently, Lutheran or Calvinist principles were only the first step towards more extreme 'atheist' positions.³ Indeed, those who expressed dissent against Catholicism did not give the impression that they were knowingly drawing on organic theories and structured traditions of religious dissent. Instead, they seemed to be trying to express themselves and highlight their individuality. In this way a kind of patchwork philosophy was created in which elements of different origins were assembled, built up by accumulation and expounded during conversation. Conversation and 'coming across as a wit' were becoming a fashion in themselves, so much so that dissimulation and Nicodemism were often second-level options compared to the clamour associated with Venetian religious dissent. Furthermore, believing in something unorthodox or having belief-related doubts made more sense as a way of communicating personal difference. Due to a widespread feeling of annoyance towards dogmas and norms, non-belief assumed a particularly significant meaning when it was expressed.

With regard to this situation, I decided to focus in particular on non-institutionalised forms of dissent, namely propositions which did not fit into an organic framework of beliefs and which were furthermore autonomously chosen as a consequence of the sceptical crisis that clearly emerges from the available sources. This was also because of new opportunities for discussion and interaction created by the widespread popularity of political news, which established itself as a widely consumed cultural product precisely in the period in question. Therefore, instead of attempting to analyse the philological roots of such doctrines or name them, I tried to map their movements and identify certain aspects of how they changed when they became part of people's lives. I opted to focus more on what I felt was the concrete articulation of heterodox discourse, namely the ambiguous boundaries between doctrines and what lies in between them, because it was here that I felt I could find the most authentic measure of belief or non-belief in Venice in my chosen period. I attempted to consider the ways in which individuals embraced heterodox ideas and then spread them, favouring the dynamic element of the communicative process with interaction between several individuals leading to personal interpretations.

³ To this end, see Federico Barbierato, 'Luterani, calvinisti e libertini. Dissidenza religiosa a Venezia nel secondo Seicento', *Studi storici*, 3 (2005): 797–844.

I took orthodoxy to be the body of theories, dogmas, articles of faith, rites, practices and words seen as under threat and considered inviolable to varying degrees by those specially appointed to defend it. I also measured how much it affected the consciousness of those who questioned it, defining it as a collection of mistakes to oppose. I have also used the concepts of ‘libertinism’, ‘irreligiousness’, ‘unbelief’, ‘atheism’ and so on in their broadest possible meanings, so that they include a wide range of heterodox expressions and, in general, the questioning of faith or related objects and matters using varying degrees of radical terms. I am fully aware of the extent to which such definitions run the risk of being vague and that it would therefore be necessary to justify their use and analyse them within a variety of contexts on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, as the text will show more clearly, I felt that I could at least partly cover the issues, thoughts and words that feature on the following pages.⁴ Indeed, it is often difficult to separate the different groups rigidly or make clear distinctions; anti-clericalism, for example, was a complex tradition that could sometimes be defined as anything but irreligious, as it was sometimes precisely in the name of religion and the recovery of authentic faith that the clergy became the target of attacks that were sometimes even violent. However, criticism was clearly not one-way and nor was it targeted exclusively at the power structures of the church, leaving dogmas and the body of beliefs that the church safeguarded intact. In this way the results of anti-clericalism tended to resemble positions of unbelief, and criticism of the clergy found perfect continuation in the denial of purgatory as an invention aimed at guaranteeing the same clergy financial profit. Similarly, devotion to saints, mass or other fundamental elements of orthodox beliefs were liable to a heterodox or irreligious reading in the broadest, most complex sense.

In any case, these phenomena were not new. The elements that led to manifestations of unbelief in the late seventeenth century had already existed for centuries, ranging from the well-known tale of the Three Rings through Averroism to Machiavellism and the reason of State on one side, to the

⁴ As far as the category of ‘libertinism’ in particular is concerned, we should remember that the term was originally coined and used in an accusatory sense and was only then taken up as a historiographical category in the nineteenth century. We should also recall that the fact that it was used in a context of controversy does not grant it methodological legitimacy: Isabelle Moreau, ‘Libertinisme et philosophie’, *Revue de Synthèse*, 1–2 (2002): 137–60. See also Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, ‘Libertinismo’, in *DSI*, vol. 2, pp. 904–6. Similar observations, linked in particular to their use in an accusatory and controversial way, hold true for more or less all the terms in question, above all for ‘atheism’, whose real presence in the society and culture of the modern age is still under discussion. Although I have tackled the issue – albeit rapidly – in Chapter 2, what interests me most is not finding out when it became possible to deny the existence of God in terms of mental tools, but rather the ways in which it was done and the words used to express it in the relevant period.

development of Anabaptist, non-Trinitarian or Evangelical propositions and theories on the other. In the same way, ‘there had always been and continued to be ... manifestations of incredulity or popular materialism’,⁵ which were inserted into a long-standing facet of Italian culture, the ‘minority but enduring tradition of “radical humanism”’, which then merged into philosophies of French origin.⁶ The new factor in the period in question was the social role assumed by such elements and manifestations. Huge resonating cracks emerged from under Counter-Reformation control in the form of doctrines with a new level of danger, not because they were limited to questioning Catholic dogma and articles of faith as had happened in the past, but because they unleashed a heated attack against religion in general.⁷ Fragments of these doctrines were expressed by individuals who now personally identified with an imaginary society of nonconformists rather than with the Church. This society was not determined on a social basis but was potentially extended to all classes and was defined according to the level of intellectual interpretation that each person felt he was capable of demonstrating. For a tailor, entering workshops and shouting that religion was invented by the governing class to control the population and that therefore everything explained as a religious fact, God included, did not really exist at all, or at least not in the form suggested by the Church, was a way to come across as a ‘virtuoso’, something of I believe he would have been fully conscious. It was essentially a state of mind rather than a philosophy, an attitude that prompted research and the proposal of arguments which were then defined over the course of interaction and disputes. I felt that the confused and vociferous result of this unbelief seemed – and continues to seem – interesting as an object of study in itself. Furthermore, the analysis of words and events

⁵ Adriano Prosperi, *Dare l'anima. Storia di un infanticidio* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005), p. 229.

⁶ Vittorio Frajese, *Profezia e machiavellismo. Il giovane Campanella* (Rome: Carocci, 2002), pp. 10–11.

⁷ Indeed, this was a European phenomenon rather than one confined to Venice. As Jonathan Israel wrote, after 1650 everything was questioned, opposed and often replaced on the basis of philosophical analysis, regardless of how fundamental or deep-rooted it was considered to be: Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 3. To a certain extent, in Venice, like elsewhere, the moment seemed ripe for ‘The day of heterodoxy has dawned, of every kind of heterodoxy, the day of malcontents, the rebels who ... had multiplied out of sight and had been awaiting the hour of their emancipation; of learned men, who declined to accept tradition at its face value, and insisted on inquiring into its credentials; of the Jansenists, who were to kindle new fire from their dim but never wholly extinguished embers; of the Biblical exegetists; of the philosophers’: Paul Hazard, *The European Mind, 1680–1715* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 123.

featuring Venetian heterodoxy can be of use in two ways; first, to reconstruct the ways in which the ideas that characterized the European crisis of conscience were received and interpreted; and, secondly, to find the results of this crisis even among classes and individuals long held to be extraneous to the reflections and problems that characterized it.⁸

One major dimension of this crisis was the different way in which the process of individual interpretation took shape; the focus of my interest is as much the extension of the ways in which this phenomenon manifested itself in areas not immediately connected to elite cultural production as the signs of incredulity in these same areas. It is undeniable that popular incredulity had a complex controversial relationship with its learned counterpart, which consisted of much more than a simple process of transmitting models and concepts from the elite to the rest of the population. What seems to emerge from an analysis of the Venetian case is not the passive reception of intellectual tools, but rather the constant attempt, on the basis of strategies which were frequently flawed, to engage individual trains of thought and use them effectively in the field of interaction. Instead of focusing my interest on intellectual circles and centres of 'primary elaboration of thought', as it were – which have recently been the subject of major studies – I concentrated on forms of dissent expressed in marginal circles, the contexts for reinterpretation and the spurious products of the processes of transmission and autonomous reflection. The underlying fact that emerges is individual originality in the appropriation and reception of concepts, although with a varying structure, and in the generation of completely new cultural products. Another aspect that emerges clearly is the undisputedly active role played by individuals in each social circle in creating or reinterpreting a religious discourse, whether it remained on permissible ground, moved into the field of dissent or even assumed an openly irreligious form. The latter result was sometimes accidental, perhaps a little incoherent and following unpredictable paths, but it was at least equally often the result of a well-defined prior choice, whereby initial confusion led to the procurement of conceptual arguments and tools in order to become stronger.

⁸ The reference is clearly to Hazard. To this end I think Robert Scribner's position is important, whereby any historian interested in the spreading of ideas tries to measure their impact on the thoughts, feelings and values of common people. In order to do so, he or she has to focus his or her attention on 'such apparently trivial material as street-corner gossip or private conversation, the very stuff of daily life': Robert W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London and Ronceverte: Hambledon Press, 1987), p. 69. On the matter of how the crisis also had a profound effect on uneducated, illiterate 'common people', see also Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 5–7, 10 and 25.

As I have already suggested, I feel that the growing information market and parallel phenomenon of the circulation and discussion of news played a fundamental role in this setting. The theory of the political imposture of religion – which constituted the main ideological bond for these fragments of thought and those opposed to normalization – managed to evolve more successfully in a context where politics played a representational role. Therefore, instead of addressing the relationship between politics and religion – whose ongoing intertwining is clearly predictable – I tried to tackle the link between political debate and religious dissent, analysing the characteristics of political information in detail along with the debate it provoked, and to identify possible interaction with the emergence of a fairly well-structured form of dissent.⁹

In Venice at least 1,000 people who belonged to the patriciate had professional daily dealings with politics. Counting all the secretaries and servants, at least as many again earned their living from politics. The latter were intermediary figures, providing a link between the worlds of the elite and those excluded from politics. In this way a kind of communication chain was created, so that even if not everyone had much of an idea about politics, they at least had an overview of the areas of life it influenced. Hundreds of people who had no direct contact with the science of government met every day to discuss matters of international diplomacy, wars and the balance of forces inside and outside the State. There was a feeling that state secrets could be revealed and were within reach of the *virtuosi*, who for their part only seemed to have to view the world from a disenchanted perspective to lift the veil of imposture used by those in power to hide their actions. It only took a few to reach this level of knowledge for the question to move to who had the qualities to be able to do so. In this respect, socio-professional status was not especially important in the end; more decisive factors were shown in what was happening, the ability to express acute original analysis in discussions and above all the open-mindedness of personal ideas.

There was certainly no lack of events to discuss and exercise critical faculties over: in Venice in the second half of the seventeenth century there was an exponential increase in the spread of journals, newspapers and information sources which reported news from all over Europe.¹⁰ The fact that people met to discuss contrasting accounts of the same events and even came to blows as a result of different readings also had the effect of creating or developing an

⁹ Political information is intended as ‘whatever may be thought or said about events connected with the government of states and with cities and their peoples’: Brendan Dooley, ‘Introduction’, in Brendan Dooley and Sabrina A. Baron (eds), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1–16, at p. 1.

¹⁰ To this end, see Mario Infelise, *Prima dei giornali. Alle origini della pubblica informazione* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2002).

embryonic form of critical acumen. As religion was starting to be seen as an aspect of politics, an instrument of government and control, political discussion inevitably tended to drift towards theological matters, providing the necessary body of evidence to demonstrate how and through which means the clergy and those in power managed to keep whole populations enslaved. Furthermore, those who read journals or got others to read them – you did not need to be literate to take part in such ‘virtuoso’ practices – were forced to redefine their position constantly on the basis of reports in the following journal, which often presented a conflicting account. They were therefore faced with a changeable situation devoid of fixed points of reference, which understandably helped contribute to the emergence of a scepticism crisis. This basic situation was also influenced by a number of other factors: the trade in books, the work and output of the Accademia degli Incogniti (Academy of the Unknowns), travel reports that rejected the argument of universal consensus to prove the existence of God and put forward an intriguing concept of otherness, the presence of Protestant circles and the concrete development of dissent in different places and at different times to name but a few. I dedicated a fair amount of attention to these elements, which determined the manner of Venetian unbelief and religious dissent through their constant overlapping and intertwining.¹¹

In this maelstrom of troubled individuals and heterodox theories I tried to analyse the moments of exchange, listen to discussions and identify the ways in which dissent spread, giving a degree of preference to the spoken word over the reconstruction of the closely-held convictions of those who offered alternative journeys of faith or simply rejected them. As one might imagine, the types of communication tended to overlap incessantly, so that each case referred to or was supported by another, to such an extent that it becomes clear how manifestations of dissent fitted into a complex articulation of different forms of expression (written, oral or gestural). They were the result of a meeting between a wealth of sources and personal feelings, but the focus of this book is above all

¹¹ As Giuseppe Ricuperati very effectively put it, ‘intellectual libertinism was at home in Padua and Venice’. Venice had been at the forefront of the jurisdictional struggle, briefly supporting Gallicanism and the Protestant world. It had produced and circulated anti-Jesuit literature widely, the real nexus of Italian libertinism. Here, then, ‘libertinism, with its breakpoint, the result of the special situation in Venice, recurred through contact with the outside world, even if this was often the superficial one of European diplomacy, which naturally put forward again all the issues in the clandestine circulation of ideas. This was the paradoxical culture of a society which was singularly closed in economic and political terms, but which maintained an interest in European matters and kept a strong tradition of books alive’: Giuseppe Ricuperati, *L’esperienza civile e religiosa di Pietro Giannone* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1970), p. 510.

the oral dimension of unbelief. Written material is considered inasmuch as it could contribute to transmitting unbelief or suggesting it as an opportunity and option.

To this end the matter of the documentation used in this study is by no means irrelevant; although it was certainly not the only source taken into consideration, large-scale recourse to the Inquisition records may lead to serious flaws in perspective. This is not, however, because it is a somewhat unusual judicial source presenting the well-known problems of this type of document, as in the end ‘The fact that a source is not “objective” (for that matter, neither is an inventory) does not mean that it is useless.’¹² Instead, it is because in the end it could give the impression of a city of atheists, unbelievers and libertines, a city where orthodox religion almost appears to be in the minority. I do not wish to claim that the social fabric was characterized across the board by criticism of Christianity and religion in general. On the contrary, I believe that cultural demands and different forms of religiousness simply interacted with what appeared to be a movement with undefined boundaries characterized by erratic attempts to break with orthodoxy, a movement which was also significant in terms of numbers. Concluding that Venice was uniformly libertine, unbelieving or atheist would mean adopting the same categories used in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century polemics and forgetting the special nature of the complex and contradictory urban and social fabric in Venice.

Finally, I will devote a few words to clarifying the chronological limits. Although I do not intend to follow them too rigidly, the 1640s seemed to be a suitable starting point. This was not only because of the standard of documentation but also because these years marked the start of the decline of the triumphant form of libertinism that had characterized the previous decade in Venice in the broadest sense, beyond mere cultural compliance with a practical political translation of anti-clerical principles. In brief, these were the years that had seen France, Venice and Tuscany as political allies against Pope Urban VIII, years in which Nuncius Francesco Vitelli worked energetically in Venice to assert Barberinian policies and orchestrated the death penalty handed out to Ferrante

¹² Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. xvii. On the use of Inquisition sources, see *L’Inquisizione romana in Italia in età moderna. Archivi, problemi di metodo e nuove ricerche. Atti del seminario internazionale. Trieste 18–20 maggio 1988* (Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali–Ufficio centrale per i beni archivistici, 1991); Luciano Osbat, ‘L’Inquisizione e la storia dei comportamenti religiosi’, in Gabriele De Rosa and Tullio Gregory (eds), *Storia dell’Italia religiosa* (3 vols, Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1994), vol. 2, pp. 375–91. See also Gigi Corazzol, *Cineografo di banditi su sfondo di monti. Feltre 1634–1642* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 1997), p. x.

Pallavicino. Urban VIII was the common enemy at the time and had been presented as such by the Republic, both publicly and officially. The Republic, which endorsed the works of Ferrante Pallavicino and defended him against ecclesiastical persecution, showed that it was so openly committed to spreading an anti-clerical message that it inevitably ended up embracing its broadest interpretations, even to the point of taking on anti-religious connotations. Outside the political arena the contrasts seemed less evident and there was a gradual reconciliation between the parties, a kind of respite in a conflict that in any case continued to be fought underground, albeit less obviously. The material put into circulation in the previous years lost its immediate contentious target but became an excellent arsenal in which to find weapons to unleash an even wider-reaching controversy, no longer directed against a single person but a whole institution and sometimes even the world of the afterlife it represented. At the same time the doctrines linked to Paduan heterodox Aristotelianism had by then evolved and become fairly widely established.

In summary, from this period onwards religious dissent could count on an ideological apparatus and a readily available vocabulary. We can say that this situation was sufficiently homogeneous at least until the 1740s. It may seem surprising to assume that there was continuity over such a long period, but the century in question was effectively characterized by a certain degree of uniformity in terms of the nature of dissent and non-belief. Admittedly, new material had gradually been added to the debate and in the meantime irreligiousness and dissent had found new allies and refined their arguments and language. Lucretian atomism, Spinozism and biblical criticism had also started playing an increasingly significant role in the typical naturalistic tradition of seventeenth-century Venetian libertinism, with its close links to Paduan heterodox Aristotelianism. However, these new contributions were mostly incorporated into categories which were fairly stable throughout the seventeenth century and the first few decades of the eighteenth century, or saw their sphere of influence limited to small groups. The instruments of libertine criticism constituted the main apparatus for calling disclosed truths into doubt well beyond the mid-eighteenth century, thereby colouring Venetian enlightenment with clear libertine undertones. Therefore, while the elements themselves may have changed, the framework that defined them seems to have remained somewhat similar.¹³ It seems to me that – in Venice and for the phenomena I studied – continuity was the predominant characteristic.

¹³ Interesting remarks were made to this end by Vincenzo Ferrone, *Scienza natura religione. Mondo newtoniano e cultura italiana nel primo Settecento* (Naples: Jovene editore, 1982), p. 277. With regard to the philosophical background to libertinism in the Republic, see Paolo Marangon, 'Aristotelismo e cartesianesimo: filosofia accademica e libertini', in

In this context the subject of Radical Enlightenment as put forward by Jonathan Israel, with its different forms and facets, assumes major importance as a point of reference for this study. It not only shares, at least approximately, the timeframe (1650–1750), but also underlines certain elements of continuity that profoundly influenced not only Venetian heterodoxy but also the European Radical Enlightenment in general, connected to two cultures that had preceded it and influenced its results. On the one hand there was a culture that was ‘heretical, set against the rights of conscience and rejecting powerful theological apparatus as opposed to universality and harmony’, and on the other hand there was ‘the long journey of the libertines and their different ways of creating principles, perhaps more than simple premises, of modernity: a thread which makes the choice of tolerance throughout the history of otherness a plausible one’.¹⁴ The idea that the example of the situation in Venice bore the signs of an age of transition in which the echoes and results of the impact of Reformation doctrines and the re-establishment of different cultures, for example, could still be measured is undoubtedly at the heart of the context in which I positioned the study. It is precisely as a result of this extension of themes and influences that there are frequent incursions into a longer chronological span (from the sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century) than the one considered directly. Therefore, I also made the methodological decision to limit my examination of documentation from the point of view of the evolution of phenomena – an evolution which, as I said, did not seem to be particularly significant – and instead to propose thematic analysis structured vertically by sector, devoting greater attention to the articulation of heterodox discourses.

Clearly, however, the period which elsewhere marked the climax of the radical experience appears to have been significantly different in the Venetian area. Here the final results of this experience manifested themselves in a lacklustre, confused way: freedom of conscience, democracy and tolerance constituted radically different targets, which in the vast majority of cases were never achieved. From this point of view, in an analysis of events involving Venetian heterodoxy, the ‘crisis’ phase certainly prevailed over the phase of the proposals which best

Storia della cultura veneta. Il Seicento, (10 vols, Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1982), vol. 4/II, pp. 95–114. Regarding the ‘straightforward continuity between earlier and later forms of unbelief’, see David Wootton, ‘Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Unbelief in the Early Modern Period’, *Journal of Modern History*, 4 (1988): 695–730, at pp. 726–7. See also Reid Barbour, ‘Atheists, Monster, Plagues and Jews’, in Roger D. Sell and Anthony W. Johnson (eds), *Writing and Religion in England, 1558–1689* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 327–46, at p. 330, who defines Renaissance Aristotelianism as a ‘complex, plural and flexible legacy’.

¹⁴ Giuseppe Ricuperati, ‘In margine al Radical Enlightenment di Jonathan Israel’, *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 1 (2003): 285–329, at p. 301.

characterize the Radical Enlightenment. Indeed, it is difficult to question the fact that at the time Venice was a place 'that favoured hospitality, free discussion and the brilliant academic careers of immigrants, but not original products or trains of thought'.¹⁵ In a certain sense the only Venetian who achieved a line of intellectual development that could be described as 'at a high level and consciously' in the field of the European Radical Enlightenment was probably Abbot Antonio Conti, although he did so within the limits of a patrician that was 'both cosmopolitan and provincial, a condition which protected him in the trial that was partly responsible for the arrest of Pietro Giannone in Venice'.¹⁶ It was nevertheless the web of personal lines of development that I was more interested in, the jumble of events which only partially tied in with the Radical Enlightenment, as the latter manifested itself as a movement breaking with both religious and political traditions. The example of Venice allows us to measure more effectively the attempt by many to question dogmas, rites and beliefs linked to religion, often in a graduated process starting from openly anti-clerical positions rather than splits from the existing political culture, which did not constitute a priority in the Venetian heterodox discourse except in rare cases.

I made the terms of my approach coincide with the account of events involving the latter Bortolo Zorzi and his group of 'free metaphysicians', whose experience came to an end somewhere between the 1730s and the early 1740s. This was therefore a time when there were complex relations between Venice and Rome, as well as difficulties within the internal political balance of the Republic. It was a period which saw the expulsion of Pietro Giannone, the trial against Abbot Antonio Conti and internal clashes within the patriciate between one group of clergy sympathizers close to the Jesuits and another more connected to the Sarpian tradition. It could be said that these years marked the fading of libertine culture into forms which, at the very least, could be described as proto-

¹⁵ Paolo Ulvioni, *Atene sulle Lagune. Bernardo Trevisan e la cultura veneziana tra Sei e Settecento* (Venice: Ateneo Veneto, 2000), p. 157.

¹⁶ Ricuperati, 'In margine al Radical Enlightenment di Jonathan Israel', p. 321. The fundamental text on Conti is Nicola Badaloni, *Antonio Conti. Un abate libero pensatore tra Newton e Voltaire* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1968). See also D. Gronda, *ad vocem*, in *DBI*; Ferrone, *Scienza natura religione*; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp. 678–80; and Antonella Barzazi, *Gli affanni dell'erudizione. Studi e organizzazione culturale degli ordini religiosi a Venezia tra Sei e Settecento* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2004). Conti was denounced to the Venetian Sant'Uffizio on 11 August 1735, among other things for having denied the immortality of the soul and the existence of heaven and God, 'alleging that it is an intelligent subject': ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 139, trial against Antonio Conti, spontaneous appearance by priest Marcantonio Quastini. For a list of the charges, see Badaloni, *Antonio Conti*, pp. 190–92.

Enlightened.¹⁷ In any case I felt that the best way to end the study would be by telling a story which is significant in many respects: a hatter with heterodox convictions who builds a library over a number of years and a group of loyal companions with whom he founds a sect. The movement of ideas and culture and the blending of the written and spoken words seemed wholly evident in this case. The tale of Bortolo was a signal for change and the start of Masonic sociability, which I felt made it a suitable end point.

Chapter 1 aims to give an idea of how the heterodox discourse was articulated in concrete terms over space and time. Chapter 2 focuses on the language of heterodoxy, the ways in which it was expressed and the discourses through which it was shared and transformed. I try to illustrate both the most frequently debated issues and the way in which they constantly intertwined to form original blends of ideas that individuals expressed, thereby recycling elements subjected to a constant flux of interaction. Chapter 3 is devoted to an analysis of the convergences between political and religious discussion and the subsequent results. There is a particular focus on the spread of the subject of religion as political imposture and the desacralization of religious discourse. Alongside such questions I allude to the problem of the social models that those who showed convictions linked to non-conformist doctrines or positions tried to adhere to. Chapter 4 aims to present a series of cases where heterodoxy spread as a result of the work of clerics and found refuge in what one would expect to be the stronghold of defenders of the official doctrine. In general, I put together the episodes to retain their singularity, while trying to show the common threads. The tale of the hatter Bortolo Zorzi's sect also forms part of this attempt, taking up a substantial part of Chapter 5. I also focus my interest here on the spread of heterodox texts and the resulting interpretations that could be made.

¹⁷ Regarding the debate on the distinction between libertinism and the Enlightenment, which perhaps cannot be resolved clearly as they were connected to different regional situations and social and cultural circles, and the positions of Giorgio Spini and Franco Venturi, see Giorgio Spini, *Barocco e puritani. Studi sulla storia del Seicento in Italia, Spagna e New England* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1991), pp. 407–33. See also Giuseppe Ricuperati, *La città terrena di Pietro Giannone. Un itinerario tra 'crisi della coscienza europea' e illuminismo radicale* (Florence: Olschki, 2001), pp. 134–5, which notes that although the libertines had the theory of the imposture of religion and used the press to divulge their doctrines, 'these roots are radically converted into the culture of crisis insofar as the issue of communication as advertising becomes a new ethical, political and religious one. And this is Enlightenment territory'.

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Chapter 1

Inside Venice

Towards Venice

On 18 May 1684 Giorgio Zanuoli, a notary, appeared before the Venetian Inquisitor. He had come from his home in Selva di Cadore in the Dolomites and had stopped off at the lagoon for business-related matters regarding a dispute that involved the community of Selva. The visit to the Sant'Uffizio must have somehow formed part of a broader legal strategy, as he submitted a charge against another notary, Francesco Bonifaci, whose habitual abode was in Pescul, a few kilometres away. The latter was also in Venice at the same time and for the same reasons:¹ he was pursuing a lawsuit 'to remove daily mass at the Collegio for souls in purgatory'. With regard to his part in the dispute, Zanuoli said that 'I am helping on behalf of the Community'.

He arrived at the Sant'Uffizio well prepared, bringing a document which explained how Bonifaci had 'exposed to those stupid people':

or to most of them the following heretical words ... namely: these saints with shrines in our churches and above the altars are idols made by men, and you believe that they are saints ... In Sant'Antonio in Padua, at the Madona dei Sette Dolori you attend mass and you have piety and you believe, but these things are not real, and if you do not wish to believe me, you must believe Cuttunio, a professor in Padua, who upon seeing many people going to venerate the saint, said what are these people doing going to worship that man, they are ... fools and idiots, and you are too if you believe in these saints, but I want to put it right, I want to remove the processions from this town, along with devotional Masses and Masses of Saint Gregory for the dead, and I want to teach you another way to live.²

¹ Giorgio Zanuoli (or Zanolli), son of Giorgio, practised as a notary in different places in Cadore from 1650 to 1705. Francesco Bonifaci, son of Valerio, only seems to have been active in Selva from 1660 to 1694: ASBl, *Notarile*, bb. 7820–37 and 997–9.

² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 123, Galdente Angela file, trial against Francesco Bonifaci, charge by Giorgio Zanuoli on 18 May 1684, cc. n.n. Giovanni Cottunio (d. 1658), Aristotelian, was Cesare Cremonini's successor at Padua University: ASV, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, b. 1, c. 433r; Leen Spruit, *Species intelligibilis. From Perception to Knowledge* (2 vols, Leiden: Brill, 1996), vol. 2, p. 327 and Marco Callegari, 'Il collegio Cottunio e la

‘Those people’ had been ‘highly confused’ by these words ‘and in such doubt that they did not know which side to take’. They were still in doubt, continued the document, because Francesco was a ‘trusted’ person and took every opportunity to reiterate his theories publicly with a certain vivacity. For his part, the parish priest seems to have tried to prevent Bonifaci from expressing his opinions in such an agitated way, but only succeeded in provoking him. Indeed, by ‘arguing against him’ publicly, he reduced him to silence. However, this was not all: during Mass in the church of San Lorenzo in Selva, ‘while the Word of the Gospel was being preached in the pulpit’, Bonifaci reprimanded ‘the preacher aloud using obscene scandalous words against the holy faith and he was forced to abandon his sermon in a terrible scandal.’³ He is claimed to have said ‘get down from there you stupid ass, it’s not true that this is the gospel; there is no gospel, there is no mass, no devotion.’⁴ According to others, his words were limited to ‘come down from there you ignorant pig.’⁵ Whatever the insult may have been, Don Giacomo Talamini, the parish priest, took fright and withdrew the charge at the Sant’Uffizio in Udine, the competent court, preferring to renounce his benefits and leave for Venice, where he perhaps hoped to find peace. He must therefore have been surprised when he saw Bonifaci stand up while he was preaching in the church of Santa Fosca and invite him in no uncertain terms to get down from the pulpit: ‘come down from there, you don’t know how to preach Mr Crow.’⁶

sua biblioteca’, in Francesco Piovan and Luciana Sitran Rea (eds), *Studenti, Università, città nella storia padovana. Atti del Convegno 6–8 febbraio 1998* (Trieste: Lint, 2001), pp. 457–69.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Deposition by Gregorio da Tos on 27 June 1684.

⁵ Indeed, on 23 October 1679 an anonymous charge sent to the Consiglio di Dieci (Council of Ten) was read out. It highlighted the criminal behaviour and ‘dishonest life’ of the notary, focusing more briefly on the heterodox propositions that would form the basis of the charge presented to the Sant’Uffizio five years later. Here, for example, is how it described the episode mentioned above where the intercession of the saints was denied: ‘this Boniffacio, giving himself over to idolatry and heretical depravity, at the beginning of last August said in public that the saints standing above the altar in Christian churches are effigies made by men. That Mary Magdalene was a whore, the saints are idols not saints, and that Cutunio from Padua said that those who went to worship the Paduan saint were foolish because he was a man and not a saint’. This type of integrated accusatory strategy, which involved recourse to different magistrates at a distance of even several years, was fairly frequent: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 112, 23 October 1679. With regard to the use of anonymous charges in the Republic, see Paolo Preto, *Persona per hora secreta. Accusa e delazione nella Repubblica di Venezia* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2003).

⁶ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 123, Angela Galdente file, trial against Francesco Bonifaci, deposition by Giovanni del Monaco on 6 July 1684.

Bonifaci's self-awareness, on the other hand, was based on solid foundations. For a long time he had given hospitality to a Jew that had converted to Christianity and had often discussed religious matters with him. In general, he said that he 'had long conversations about faith and its ways and means and read books, in particular the *Clavicola Salomonis* (Key of Solomon), he knew how to live in his own way, and that all this was being used against him, that he knew how to deal with them, that he was not afraid of any form of justice, and the like'.

Similar conversations and readings must have contributed to forming convictions and a good level of trust in his own resources. The *Clavicula Salomonis*, for example, a book of magic that was especially well known in the seventeenth century, provided him with occult knowledge and a vast repertoire of expertise and methods so as to exert a certain level of power in the world. Above all, though, it must have given him the feeling of having access to a text that was denied to the majority of people, a hidden form of knowledge restricted to just a few.⁷ Furthermore, even though the Jew he had talked to had converted, he had nonetheless come into contact with a different form of religiousness, one which was forbidden and only accessible to those who knew how to make unprejudiced use of their ability to think. It was difficult to think of a better place than Venice to make the most of such opportunities, and Bonifaci was indeed a regular visitor to the city.

Around 20 years later and about 30 kilometres from Selva, in Belluno, Giovanni Casotti, a carpenter, reported his dealings with Nicolò Natali, a Dalmatian of uncertain profession, to the local Inquisitor. When writing to his Venetian colleague, the Inquisitor from Belluno later described Natali as 'a vagabond, who delights in being a physician, and boasts that he has wonderful secrets on the question of medicine and surgery obtained from a Levantine'.⁸ He passed himself off as a doctor in Belluno and treated nobleman Francesco Mazzani, Casotti's godfather, as one of his patients. While discussing the invalid's condition with Casotti, a priest, his nephew and Antonio Tonetti, a worker, in May 1708 'the same Nicola jumped up and held forth to those present: I'll tell you what death is! The soul is like smoke from a cooking pot, which disappears when it has finished boiling'. The result was an altercation, whereby the carpenter invited those present not to pay attention to these senseless words because 'he's

⁷ With regard to the *Clavicula* and its uses, see Federico Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli. Clavicula Salomonis e libri di magia a Venezia nei secoli XVII e XVIII* (Milan: Edizioni Sylvestre Bonnard, 2002).

⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, trial against Nicolò Natali, cc. n.n., letter by Inquisitor in Belluno to his colleague in Venice on 13 June 1709. The trial was started by the Sant'Uffizio of Belluno and moved to Venice on 4 July 1709, to where it was believed the accused might have relocated.

a madman, and being Dalmatian, he's like those Morlachs who breed and live among beasts, because if a zealous member of the Holy Inquisition heard him speaking like that, he would go to report him to the Sant'Uffizio'.

However, Natali did not allow himself to be influenced by others. He had already had the opportunity to claim that 'even if I were called by the same Inquisition, I would argue my case to the same Inquisition,'⁹ given that 'I have been to the Inquisition on other occasions, and so I don't have to prove anything to them.'¹⁰ Indeed, he had continued 'by saying that the earth moved, that the sun was still, and other mathematical issues' that the carpenter had not understood, 'as he was not skilled in the subject'.¹¹ There must have been more understanding of theology than mathematics in the area, given that the image of smoke from a cooking pot used by Natali to illustrate his vision of the mortality of the soul started to spread rapidly among acquaintances. It certainly caught on: an old woman used the formula in the market square in public and a German boy used the same words to try to explain the concept to one of Mazzani's maids.¹²

Natali must have left Belluno soon afterwards and headed for Venice. The case documents were sent to Venice at the beginning of July 1709, after the Roman Congregation of the Sant'Uffizio had ordered his imprisonment in June after being informed of the facts.¹³ The case was not heard in the Venetian court until 26 November. Only two days had gone by before Natali presented himself before the Inquisitor of his own free will. Such spontaneity was a fairly ambiguous concept in similar cases and constituted quite a common defence strategy. Natali had probably decided to avert action by the Inquisition after being warned or after imagining the opening of proceedings. To show that he was worried about the cause of faith, he accused a peasant from San Bellino, near Rovigo, of necromancy. He said that he was 40 years old, 'a soldier ... a foreigner without a fixed abode' and that he had come because his confessor had ordered him to do so. Unsurprisingly, he described himself as pious and devout, and when the Inquisitor challenged him with regard to the events in Belluno,

⁹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, spontaneous appearance by Giovanni Casotti on 1 June 1708.

¹⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, deposition by Antonio Tonetti on 1 June 1708. With quite an unusual procedure, perhaps dictated by the seriousness of the accusations, the court called the witnesses to testify on the same day that the charge was brought.

¹¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, spontaneous appearance by Giovanni Casotti on 1 June 1708.

¹² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, depositions by Francesca Mazzani and Maria Gatta on 15 June 1708.

¹³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, letter from the Belluno Inquisitor to his colleague in Venice on 6 June 1709.

he admitted that he had been in Belluno to treat Mazzani. He freely admitted practising 'the profession of doctor' and that the previous year 'he had toured Friuli for similar reasons', but had never heard any heterodox doctrines, 'and hearing these things brings me to tears'.¹⁴ His line of defence must have sounded convincing, as the Inquisitor released him 'pending trial', after having warned him not to indulge in such discourses anymore. There are no further traces of Natali in the Sant'Uffizio records.

In Venice

Bonifaci and Natali were only two of many similar daily arrivals in Venice. In addition to reasons of business or seeking employment, such people were attracted by its reputation as a free city and the opportunity to learn new things, procure books and express themselves there. So what kind of world did they find when they arrived in the city? Which groups might have influenced their beliefs, ideas and states of mind?

As far as orthodoxy is concerned, Venice was not affected by the years of the Reformation and the Interdict, when some genuinely thought that the city might sensationally choose to break from Rome. They were, however, not straightforward years and the Sant'Uffizio and the authorities – both in Rome and Venice – faced a range of difficulties in governing through them. Heresy was knocking at the door and was in some way endorsed by certain areas of the patriciate. Overall, however, it continued to pursue a strongly jurisdictional policy towards ecclesiastical demands, attempting to restrict their influence as much as possible. The ruling class in Venice seemed to harbour a certain interest in the Reformation. However, although it was 'extensive ... and not always superficial', it turned out to be 'equally ambiguous in essence'.¹⁵ The first stages of the Reformation increasing its influence in Italy were characterized by the misplaced hope that the new Confession would find comfortable asylum in Venice. Such expectations were soon dashed: following the collapse of the Schmalkaldic League in 1547, the Lutheran alternative no longer constituted a practicable option for Venice, especially in political terms.¹⁶ At the same time the Catholics reacted by closing ranks and the institution and subsequent establishment of modern inquisitional courts eliminated any possibility of large-

¹⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, spontaneous appearance by Nicolò Natali on 28 November 1709.

¹⁵ Federica Ambrosini, *Storie di patrizi e di eresia nella Venezia del '500* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1999), p. 81.

¹⁶ On the importance of 1547 as a turning point, see Adriano Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza. Inquisitori, confessori, missionari* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), pp. 85–101.

scale internal action. Furthermore, from at least the 1560s onwards the Venetian government became fully aware of the problem and started to express an openly repressive stance against heresy, even if the usual tolerance shown towards foreign students and merchants still fuelled residual hopes on the one hand and fears on the other.¹⁷

There continued to be problems linked above all to the Radical Reformation and Anabaptist and Anti-Trinitarian circles, whose presence remained a constant source of worry until the 1580s, when it seemed that the danger had been averted. The outbreak of the issue of the Interdict in 1606 and the expectations that accompanied it seemed like a momentary reoccurrence of what had been feared around 70 years earlier, when Venice was the potential gateway to the Reformation. It was, however, a 'political' episode, which did not seem to meet with general dissent, or at least not enough to give Reformation principles a dominant position within the social fabric.¹⁸

Therefore, heresy seemed to be under control by the mid-1580s. The Anabaptists were nothing more than a memory and the Inquisition was able to focus on the persecution of witches, wizards and sorceresses, undertaking a fight against superstition, whether consciously or not.¹⁹ The situation appeared to have returned to a state of normality.

However, if the Counter-Reformation really had won, why did foreign visitors passing through Venice never cease to highlight the scarce religiousness on show, emphasizing at the very least a tendency towards scepticism or at worst atheism? From the last decades of the sixteenth century onwards the common European opinion of Italy was that it was, in Naudé's famous words, 'pleine de

¹⁷ As Nuncius Facchinetti wrote in 1567, in France the Huguenots went around saying that 'Venice, the key of Italy, is a friend of theirs because of the tolerance seen there of the Germans at the Fondaco and the scholars in Padua': letter by Giovanni Antonio Facchinetti on 1 February 1567, in A. Stella (ed.), *Nunziature di Venezia*, VIII (marzo 1566–marzo 1569) (Rome: Istituto storico per l'età moderna e contemporanea, 1963), p. 167.

¹⁸ On these aspects of the Interdict and the climate of trust in the change that it created, see Gaetano Cozzi, *Paolo Sarpi tra Venezia e l'Europa* (Turin: Einaudi, 1979) and 'Stato e Chiesa', and the bibliography given here. See also Gilberto Sacerdoti, *Sacrificio e sovranità. Teologia e politica nell'Europa di Shakespeare e Bruno* (Turin: Einaudi, 2002).

¹⁹ Almost all scholars agree about this change in the objectives of the Inquisition. It was a general phenomenon that spread across all areas controlled by the Roman Inquisition. Without listing all the local studies, I will mention the general study by John Tedeschi-William Monter, 'Toward a Statistical Profile of the Italian Inquisitions, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries', in John Tedeschi, *The Prosecution of Heresy: Collected Studies on the Inquisition in Early Modern Italy* (Binghamton, NY: Runnymede Books, 1991), pp. 89–126. See also Andrea Del Col, *L'inquisizione in Italia dal XII al XXI secolo* (Milan: Mondadori, 2006), pp. 772–84.

libertins et d'athées'.²⁰ This was echoed by Guy Patin, according to whom the peninsula was characterized by syphilis, the practice of poisoning and atheism.²¹ The freedom of thought enjoyed in a country that seemed anything but disciplined to many people had become something of a platitude.²² However, what both detractors and admirers were really referring to was the 'little Italy' made up of Venice, Padua, Florence and Rome. The two cities in the Republic in particular were distinguished by their unbelieving philosophers, freedom of thought and a tenacious attempt to maintain autonomy as opposed to being controlled by Rome. It was the 'rhetorical place of freedom of thought'²³ which Jean Bodin chose in around 1593 to set his *Colloquium heptaplomeres*, the ideal setting for bringing together his seven protagonists from different religions and philosophical convictions, ranging from Catholicism to unbelief. Bodin claimed that people arrived from everywhere, attracted by the freedom and the 'douceur de l'indépendance', both those who wanted to dedicate themselves to trading and goods and 'qu'ils se proposent de se donner entièrement a ces beaux loisirs si dignes des personnes libres et qui ne savent ce que c'est que d'engager leur franchise'.²⁴ In the mid-seventeenth century one of the many incarnations of

²⁰ *Naudaeana et Patiniana, ou singularitez remarquables, prises des conversations de mess. Naudé et Patin, 2. éd. rev., corr. et augm. d'additions au Naudaeana qui ne sont point dans l'édition de Paris* (Amsterdam: François Vander Plaats, 1703), p. 8.

²¹ 'L'Italie est un pays de vérole, d'empoisonnements et d'athéisme': letter 452 to André Falconet, in J.H. Reveillé-Parise (ed.), *Lettres de Gui Patin, nouvelle édition augmentée de lettres inédites, précédée d'une notice biographique; accompagnée de remarques scientifiques, historiques, philosophiques et littéraires* (3 vols, Paris: Baillière, 1846), vol. 3, p. 80.

²² A fair number of quotations in Giorgio Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini. La teoria dell'impostura delle religioni nel Seicento italiano* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1983), pp. 7–9, and Nicholas Davidson, 'Unbelief and Atheism in Italy, 1500–1700', in Michael Hunter and David Wootton (eds), *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 55–7.

²³ Vittorio Frajese, *Sarpi scettico. Stato e chiesa a Venezia tra Cinque e Seicento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), p. 35.

²⁴ Jean Bodin, *Colloque entre sept scavans qui sont de differens sentimens des secrets cachez des choses relevees*, François Berriot (ed.) (Geneva: Droz, 1984), p. 1. The passage is used by, among others, Corrado Vivanti in *Lotta politica e pace religiosa in Francia fra Cinque e Seicento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974²), p. 64. On the image of the city that emerges from the *Colloquium*, see Daria Perocco, 'La presenza di Venezia nel *Colloquium heptaplomeres*', in Karl F. Faltenbacher (ed.), *Magie, Religion und Wissenschaften im Colloquium heptaplomeres* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002), pp. 89–101. Inside the same collection, Karl F. Faltenbacher, 'Überlegungen zur Rezeptionsgeschichte' (pp. 1–52) and David Wootton, 'Pseudo-Bodin's *Colloquium heptaplomeres* and Bodin's *Démonomanie*' (pp. 175–225) throw into doubt the attribution of the text to Bodin and put forward the current advanced attribution theories. On this debate, see also Noel Malcolm, 'Jean Bodin

Pasquino stopped in Venice on the run from Rome. He chose the city because he wanted ‘to enjoy the lucky influence of this free sky, where those noble souls who illustrated the atmosphere in Rome moved to, when the ancient age of true liberty flourished below him’. He found an ‘illustrious land’ where one could savour ‘the true golden age’.²⁵

The disappearance of a named threat, the Reformation, with precise recognized characteristics left a backdrop of individuals. The dispelling of the cloud now made it possible to see the debris from the struggle, the pieces of a fragmentary but widespread form of heterodoxy which was difficult to seize and persecute. The series of individual singular visions of the world and faith presented a danger which was difficult to name: ‘Lutherans’, ‘atheists’, ‘deists’, ‘wits’, ‘politicians’ and ‘*politichisti*’ (a pejorative term for politicians who use religion) were just some of the pigeonholes which different inquisitors, nunzios and consultants used to try to place the deviant phenomena that confronted them. This situation was apparent to those who entered the *calli*, listened to what people were saying, stopped off in *botteghe* (workshops or shops), went to the theatre or had conversations in St Mark’s Square. For them Venice already seemed to be seething with dissenting unrest and when the Sant’Uffizio became aware of the problem too, its first difficulty was to define the enemy. Calvinists and Lutherans could still be found in Venice and would have been present in surprising numbers, especially in the second half of the seventeenth century, when a state body such as the Esecutori contro la bestemmia (Executors against Blasphemy) was involved in an ongoing operation to dismantle heretical groups principally comprised of French Huguenot merchants, who had taken refuge in a city which must have seemed sufficiently safe, given that it provided the opportunity to meet Lutherans, Jews, Muslims and travellers from different places with equally different attitudes towards faith and religious confessions.²⁶

and the Authorship of the “Colloquium Heptaplomeres”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 69 (2006): 95–150. ‘Whoever the author was, however, the imaginary academy in the Colloquium perhaps had concrete confirmation, if Sarpi was accused of attending clandestine or semi-clandestine meetings, such as a certain “academy” in which discussions were held about Machiavelli and the mortality of the soul’: Gaetano Cozzi, ‘Note introduttive’, in Paolo Sarpi, *Pensieri*, Gaetano and Luisa Cozzi (eds) (Turin: Einaudi-Ricciardi, 1976), p. XXXVI. On the restless intellectual world in the period, see also Cozzi, *Paolo Sarpi*, and Vittorio Frajese, *Profezia e machiavellismo. Il giovane Campanella* (Rome: Carocci, 2002), pp. 43–5.

²⁵ ASV, *Miscellanea atti diversi-Manoscritti*, b. 65, *Del Pasquino esiliato. Parlata prima. Pasquino et il Gobbo di Rialto*.

²⁶ See Federico Barbierato, ‘Luterani, calvinisti e libertini. Dissidenza religiosa a Venezia nel secondo Seicento’, *Studi storici*, 3 (2005): 797–844. The anti-Calvinist choice in the second half of the seventeenth century was only undertaken when the size of the

It was a heterogeneous melting pot of people and religious ideas that combined to create assimilation and clashes, discussions, refusals and intriguing prospects of change. In such a context it was difficult to establish and enforce the boundaries between belief and non-belief, or between good faith and bad faith. From this point of view it is well known that – in general terms – the discovery of the Other played an extraordinarily important role in the onset of the crisis of the European conscience. As a result of travel reports, ideas of ownership, freedom and justice were questioned once more, first of all because ‘instead of all differences being referred to one universal archetype, the emphasis was now on the particular, the irreducible, the individual; in the second, because notions hitherto taken for granted could now be checked in the light of facts ascertained by actual experience, facts readily available to all enquiring minds’.²⁷ All this enabled the formation of an index of evidence and examples that Pierre Bayle used to work out the theory of the virtuous atheist, thereby moving observations of an informative nature into the field of religious and moral

phenomenon was about to become significant and dangerous from a political point of view, an aspect towards which the government had always paid particular attention. The same thing happened, as we shall see, with Quietism, which was challenged although it was widespread within broad sectors of the patriciate. As the *Consultori in iure* that Fra’ Celso Viccioni, Fra’ Odoardo Valsecchi and Antonio Sabini wrote a few years later, it was ‘unfortunately true that heresy always takes sedition with it as an inseparable companion’: ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 21, consultation on 21 March 1709. Moreover, the consideration was common in political treatises. See also the many works by Giovanni Botero: ‘I conclude with the advice given to Augustus by Maecenas: “Honour God always, in accordance with the ancient laws, and see to it that others do the same. Hate and punish all innovators in divine matters, not only out of respect for the gods (and a man who despises them will have no respect for anything), but because changes in religion lead to other kinds of change, and thence to plots, sedition and secret meetings, all of them things highly unacceptable to a ruler”’: *The Reason of State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), p. 66.

²⁷ Paul Hazard, *The European Mind, 1680–1715* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. 25. On the ‘discovery of the Other’ as an agent of scepticism in the sixteenth century, see Danilo Marcondes, ‘The Anthropological Argument: The Rediscovery of Ancient Skepticism in Modern Thought’, in José R. Maia Neto, Gianni Paganini and John Christian Laursen (eds), *Skepticism in the Modern Age: Building on the Work of Richard Popkin* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2009), pp. 37–53. For the medieval world, see Fatemeh Chenhregosha Azinfar, *Atheism in the Medieval Islamic and European World: The Influence of Persian and Arabic Ideas of Doubt and Skepticism on the Medieval European Literary Thought* (Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, 2008) and Henrik Lagerlund (ed.), *Rethinking the History of Skepticism: The Missing Medieval Background* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). On the other hand, the danger had appeared since the Crusades: Maria Rosa Menocal, *The Arabic Role in Medieval Literary History* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia University Press, 1987), pp. 35–41.

dissent.²⁸ More specifically, it is clear that a mercantile city like Venice, which witnessed a daily flow of people and goods, was characterized by the distribution of news and information about different peoples and their incredible variety of customs. Therefore, even though *La Serenissima* had not directly participated in overseas expansion, 'it had played a leading role in divulging through the press the previously untold and in many ways unnerving vision of the world which European culture and the European conscience could no longer avoid facing'.²⁹

In Venice more than anywhere else in Italy the outside world arrived in the form of people with spoken or written accounts and it could be consumed indirectly through these portrayals. The attention bestowed on 'descriptions of the world', which had started to occur since at least the mid-sixteenth century, grew progressively: world maps, prints, cosmographic paintings, depictions and views of cities were all incredibly popular and became an essential decorative feature, especially in the houses of the richest social classes. Their popularity highlighted the value attributed to luxury consumer goods, but also the city's deep-rooted projection towards and interest in the outside world, whereby the existence and knowledge of countries unknown in ancient times was an accepted fact.³⁰ It was a kind of graphic translation of travel accounts and descriptions, which immediately showed the size of the world and the difference within it, at the same time highlighting the relative smallness of individual experience.

It would, however, be reductive to limit ourselves to these materials when others also influenced the shaping of mental processes with similar effects, although they are more elusive and more difficult to measure in terms of presence. The oral dimension of travellers' and merchants' accounts, travel stories and news brought from outside and discussed in public sometimes produced partial

²⁸ See, for example, *Pensées diverses sur la comète*, originally published in 1682 'à Cologne, Chez Pierre Marteau' and reprinted several times. I used the Laterza edition (Rome, Bari, 1997, Italian translation of the 1699 second edition). See in particular pp. 320ff.

²⁹ Federica Ambrosini, *Paesi e mari ignoti. America e colonialismo europeo nella cultura veneziana (secoli XVI-XVII)* (Venice: Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Venezie, 1982), p. 4. Again according to the author, 'for a Venetian reader with an average education ... it would consequently have been somewhat difficult to avoid being affected in some way by some fragment of the myriad of messages, testimonies and simple informative descriptions that assailed anyone who had even a passing interest in reading from every direction, even if he was indifferent to the navigators' success stories': p. 12. On travelling and Venetian travel writings, see Giuliano Lucchetta, 'Viaggiatori, geografi e racconti di viaggio dell'età barocca', in *Storia della cultura veneta. Il Seicento*, (10 vols, Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1982), vol. 4/II, pp. 201–50.

³⁰ There is an overview of the presence of such material in Venetian homes in Federica Ambrosini, "Descrittioni del mondo" nelle case venete dei secoli XVI e XVII', *Archivio Veneto*, 117 (1981): 67–79.

assimilation and original responses, but definitely put individuals face to face with the problem of a form of otherness that was often attractive. Fausto Verdelli, who arrived in the city in 1618 with years of travel experience behind him, spoke in admiring tones about the difference ‘of mores and habits in countries’ and claimed that he had drawn a basic conclusion about social hierarchies from observing foreign worlds: ‘it would be a good thing if we were all equal’.³¹ Alternatively, take the example of Abbot Ciampé of San Severino, who in 1710, on his return from China, provided entertainment by recounting what he had seen. He spoke of cities like Peking, inhabited by six or seven million people, including a very few Catholics, Canton, which was only slightly smaller, and Macao.³² As a result of the ‘compression of distances’ linked to the opportunity to learn about new worlds and truths, the unfamiliar soon became familiar, the inaccessible became available and the far-off took a relative step closer.³³

‘Relatively near’ is an appropriate term because it was not necessary to travel to the Indies to experience the Other directly. It was much more within reach: in the *Stato da Màr*, for example. Those returning from trips for military purposes, trade or any other reason brought with them the strong impression of the irreducible difference of the customs they had come into contact with. They were countries that only appeared to have been evangelized to a limited degree, in which fragments of Greek rituals persisted tenaciously, combined with the results of sometimes less than impeccable missionary work. It was therefore a fairly close form of otherness, but one which nevertheless sometimes managed to question the organizational structures of the Church and its dogma, and outlined religious solutions. Although these did not provide evidence against the argument of universal consensus, they at least offered stimuli for realizing that alternatives to one’s own confession existed. Antonio Zane, for example,

³¹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 522, document presented by Girolamo Memmo on 1 September 1618. Verdelli seems to belong to the growing ranks of seventeenth-century adventurers. He had already been to Venice at least once in 1614, at a time when he was working as an informer for several ambassadors. In 1617 he returned, standing out for the audacity of his comments about the Republic: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 608, reports by Alessandro Granzino, and ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 638, file 1602–1618, anonymous informer, report by Tommaso Baglioni on 11 September 1617. A few biographical hints appear in Paolo Preto, *I servizi segreti di Venezia. Spionaggio e controspionaggio ai tempi della Serenissima* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2004), p. 127.

³² ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 705, news from Venice of 18 October 1710.

³³ Serge Gruzinski, ‘Les mondes mêlés de la monarchie catholique et autres connected histories’, *Annales*, 1 (2001): 85–117, at 94. On the ‘connected history’, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *From the Tagus to the Ganges: Explorations in Connected History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and *Mughals and Franks: Explorations in Connected History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

had been particularly struck by the custom he had come across in the Levant of burying the dead and leaving food near them. He was won over by this way of treating the dead, because he started thinking about the issue of the transmigration of souls. As a result, in 1711 he publicly advised the Venetians that in this way hungry souls would find the necessary sustenance before moving into other bodies and giving them shape.³⁴

As I have said, these were lands where an original acculturation process had taken place, whereby a frequently superficial evangelization campaign was superimposed over the persistent tenacity of the local culture, perhaps carried out by the same men who fed off heterodox stimuli in Venice and who transmitted, whether knowingly or not, messages that were spurious or completely different from orthodoxy in their preaching and other daily work. In Corfu in 1679 a Jesuit preached that at the point of death a confession could be heard by anyone if a priest was not available, and in Parenzo in the 1660s Don Giacomo Morosini became well known as anything but a model of virtue. His penchant for blasphemy and a resolutely bad lifestyle led people to lose their piety and forced the bishop to intervene personally.³⁵ Morosini not only denied the intercession of the saints with God but also the perfection of God himself on the basis of the statement of fact that he did not eat or sleep, offering to provide evidence in public ‘with ... theology’.³⁶ His convictions also found a practical application in the field of pastoral work, given that during Mass he stopped halfway through the *confiteor* and omitted to read the formula of consecration. In Venice he spent a fair amount of time in a *spezieria* (spice shop) in San Girolamo, where for want of anything better to do he devoted himself to discussions and writing lascivious letters.³⁷

The social fabric bore the signs of this lack of discipline. One example of this is the heated marital conversations between Cornelia Gardesan and her husband Matteo Pangali in Zante in the 1670s. She had come from Candia after the surrender and venerated images, especially those of the Virgin Mary. Matteo, on the other hand, expressed doubts which were sometimes even serious:

³⁴ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 134, trial against Antonio Zane, deposition by Domenico Rivagio known as Caldana on 5 May 1711.

³⁵ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 112, trial against Father Giacomo Morosini, cc. 1r–v, copies of documents sent from Parenzo dated 12 April 1663.

³⁶ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 112, sentence against Father Giacomo of 9 July 1669.

³⁷ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 112, declaration by Father Giacomo on 15 June 1665. He had been arrested on 11 June in the Ghetto. On 18 March he had received a licence to talk to the nuns of Santa Maria della Celestia and those of *Corpus Domini*. As well as the aforementioned licence, he was found to be carrying some papers on topics of an erotic nature.

What virgin? Do you really believe, Cornelia, that St Joseph didn't have carnal relations with the Madonna? I answered him: Jesus, what are you saying, if the Holy Virgin was always a virgin and then also gave birth to the son of God, she always remained a virgin as the church preaches, and as I have heard from religious men and preachers since I was a girl, and so I say to you; how can you say that she had relations with Saint Joseph? He replied: So why do the papers say that Saint Joseph was her husband? They too as husband and wife, when they were locked in the bedroom, did what married men do with their wives, yes, yes what I'm telling you is true. I answered him: dear Mattio don't say these things for the love of God, because I'm afraid that the earth will open up and swallow you, because if Saint Joseph was the Virgin Mary's husband, it was with God's permission and on His order, so that he could look after her and defend her in this life, and provide for her needs. He added: stop there doctor, because I know what I'm telling you and it must be believed.

The ironic use of the word 'doctor' found some justification in Cornelia's pedagogical work with their servant, who often enjoyed pondering the meaning of the miracles of St George, which were depicted in a painting in the kitchen. One evening at dinner, on hearing the explanation, Matteo burst out:

Miracles? What miracles? They're all fairy tales, because St George was definitely not a saint, but instead was a stratiot (a Greek word meaning foot soldier), and when he was alive he did what all other men do, so don't stand here telling me these fairy tales. I answered him: dear Sir, aren't you ashamed of yourself for saying these heresies? He added furiously: you should speak less, doctor.

He then went even further:

Another night when we were both in bed, the same Mattio Pangali picked up a familiar subject and told me that it was certainly not God that had created men and women, but that it was the devil who had created them. Here I started to raise my voice as I hated his abhorrent propositions, and I told him, as I have always heard Greek and Latin preachers and virtuous men say, that God created them and not the devil, always making the sign of the holy cross as I said these words as I was really frightened. He added: don't you want to believe the truth, don't I know what I'm telling you? Be quiet unless you want to be beaten. I answered again: as a Christian, I don't know who is keeping me from hitting my head against that

wall on hearing this blasphemy. He then got really agitated and got out of bed furiously, so I kept quiet so as not to irritate him further.³⁸

Clearly these situations were not comparable to those that could be found in 'our Indies', countries with a very limited degree of Christian penetration that were part of Italian territory,³⁹ but they were still to some extent a sign of the heterodoxy that was inserting certain elements into an autonomous context of discontent with the Catholic religion, elements that were encountered through a series of influences: books, preachers, soldiers, Venetian government staff and so on. Those who fostered them had the opportunity to structure their alternative beliefs or unbelief accordingly, having recourse to images and concepts that provided the necessary materials for the most fashionable scepticism in Venice.

Arrivals and departures

As we will see, there was an extremely broad set of heterodox theories and propositions available. They ranged from claims of the mortality of the soul to the theorization of the absolute freedom of natural instinct, from denial of the existence of hell and punishments after death to denial of the universal nature of moral codes and from criticism of miracles to the concept of religion as a manmade product used for political ends. All things considered, these were classic themes in their own way, typical of an underlying disquiet that had started to influence life in Europe in an increasingly persistent way from at least the late sixteenth century onwards. The themes sometimes all cropped up together or individually, or even more frequently in groups. For example, the claim that there was no hell or a system of punishments after death was often accompanied by the theorization of the primacy of instinct, especially in the sexual field, constituting a theoretical justification through which even the concept of sin was rejected. As we will see later on, these subjects and themes somehow echoed with elements of doctrines and theories from which single parts or suggestions

³⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 117, trial against Matteo Pangali, session on 24 August 1674, letter from Cornelia Gardesan to the Inquisitor of Venice dated 30 June 1674. The letter is written by Fra' Giovan Francesco Demezo, *provinciale* of the Minori Osservanti. Cornelia was unable to leave for Venice because of an illness and got the friar to write her letter. He had become her spiritual guide after she had left her conjugal home and taken refuge in her parents' house. The writing is accompanied by a letter from Cornelia's father, Giovan Battista Gardesan. Both letters were delivered to the Sant'Uffizio by Cornelia's brother, Giovan Antonio.

³⁹ On this issue, see Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, pp. 551–99 and the bibliography.

had been extracted. To use the example of the instinct released from any moral obligation once again, this idea was also borne out in Quietist doctrines (in the broadest sense), according to which nothing that an individual did after receiving divine grace could constitute a sin.⁴⁰

A journey through the city could have provided at least an inkling of all this, as it positioned itself as a must for those who wished to build alternative doctrines. The image of freedom that it transmitted was fed by an effective margin of autonomy from Rome that had been won after a tough jurisdictional battle with many vicissitudes. Above all it was connected to the fact that anyone who knew how to create a network of protection could count on relative immunity. Venice was conscious of being a case apart and this constituted a not inconsiderable part of the characteristic myth that had become such a deep and integral part of the city's culture. The claim of the specific nature of Venice and its freedom was made by none other than the patriciate and in general by those employed in the public services. It was a sign of pride and distinction. Giovanni Maria Bertolli, a 'consultore' (public auditor) and Servite, wrote in 1720 regarding the rising number of books condemned by Rome:

I know too that many other princes, or their inquisitions in this Italy of ours close an eye in similar circumstances, but this serene dominion has to keep them wide open, because the Holy Office was received here with particular treatises and pacts, and thus it must not be ruled according to the principles applied elsewhere ... I learnt from a great teacher of mine that Catholic princes do not necessarily have to dislike everything that Rome happens not to like.⁴¹

Venice thus had a reputation as a free city safe from the surveillance of the Inquisition. Although this was not completely deserved, given that an Inquisition court was still operating with a certain degree of alertness, it must have attracted the attention of those who had made an existential choice out of heterodoxy and eccentricity with respect to the constituted order. Clearly, given the influx of people of this kind, even those who had not consciously chosen a similar outlook on life could easily and perhaps unconsciously chance upon the necessary instruments for moving away from the official religion. The city experienced a daily movement of men and ideas which was difficult for the authorities to control. This was especially true for the Sant'Uffizio, which

⁴⁰ An interesting attempt to coordinate similar theories in an organic vision, applied, however, to French 'libertin érudits', was carried out by Françoise Charles-Daubert, *Les libertins érudits en France au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: PUF, 1998), in particular pp. 113–15.

⁴¹ ASV, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, b. 370, document written by Fra' Bertolli on 6 September 1720.

despite relying on a fairly extensive structure of informers could not cope with the frequency with which people appeared and disappeared in a city where it was quite easy to vanish without trace.⁴² As Girolamo Donzellini, a doctor, claimed in 1561 on an informed basis, cities like Venice and Padua:

for being well-populated, full of people from other places, different types of people, and especially scholars, give the opportunity to make a lot of friends and acquaintances ... Now as our age is so curious about matters of faith, not content with or finding peace in the faith of our forefathers, it is always on the lookout for new sects, especially learned men and scholars.⁴³

Indeed, Giordano Bruno and Tommaso Campanella put in an appearance at the end of the sixteenth century, as did Giulio Cesare Vanini immediately after the Interdict crisis some years later.⁴⁴ The flow of heterodox figures – perhaps not especially original but at least destined for less tragic outcomes – certainly showed no signs of diminishing as the decades passed. For example, Giuseppe Rodriguez was a visitor at the beginnings of the 1660s. He was a self-styled painter, a doctor of law and not least a gazetteer, who could be recognized by a scar on his face, the result of a severe beating.⁴⁵ As a forger of papal bulls, insensitive to the subtle contradiction between his work and thoughts, he made a name for himself

⁴² Also in the literal sense: in 1574 Nunzio Giambattista Castagna (later Pope Urban VII) explained to Rome how problematic it was to have a wanted man imprisoned: ‘the trouble lies in finding him, because as you know Venice is like a labyrinth’: *Nunziature di Venezia*, XI (18 giugno 1573–22 dicembre 1576), A. Buffardi (ed.) (Rome: Istituto storico per l’età moderna e contemporanea, 1972), p. 173.

⁴³ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 39, Girolamo Donzellini file, memorial *inc.* ‘Reverendi et illustrissimi signori. Da principio che io ritornai ...’ presented by Donzellini in November 1561. For a brief profile of Donzellini, see Anne Jacobson Schutte, in *DBI, ad vocem*.

⁴⁴ There is obviously an ample bibliography on these figures. With reference to the issues dealt with here, see Luigi Firpo, *I processi di Tommaso Campanella* (Rome: Salerno editrice, 1998); Germana Ernst, *Tommaso Campanella. The Book and the Body of Nature* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010); Frajese, *Profezia e machiavellismo*; Miguel A. Granada, ‘Maquiavelo y Giordano Bruno. Religion civil y critica del cristianismo’, *Bruniana et Campanelliana*, 4/2 (1998): 281–306; Francesco Beretta, ‘Giordano Bruno e l’inquisizione romana. Considerazioni sul processo’, *Bruniana et Campanelliana*, 7/1 (2001): 15–49; Luigi Firpo, *Il processo di Giordano Bruno* (Rome: Salerno editrice, 1993). On Vanini, see Cesare Vasoli, ‘Vanini e il suo processo per ateismo’, in Friedrich Niewöner and Olaf Pluta (eds), *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance* (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz Verlag, 1999), pp. 129–44 and Francesco P. Raimondi (ed.), *Giulio Cesare Vanini e il libertinismo* (Galatina: Congedo editore, 2000).

⁴⁵ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 110, Fra’ Fontanarosa file, trial against Don Donato Franchez, statement by Fra’ Giuseppe Evangelista of Matera on 8 February 1661.

by rejecting papal authority and insisting that excommunications were only political operations invented by different popes.⁴⁶ There were often individuals like Rodriguez who operated within – and sometimes far beyond – the grey area with an ambiguous boundary regarding what was lawful and consented in both political and religious terms: whether they were Cartesian priests, libertine friars, spies and double-dealers, staunch supporters of theoretical social egalitarianism, ambassadors and embassy agents, alchemists, heretics, libertines or unbelievers, it was difficult to place them precisely or even give them a clear identity.

With regard to Abbot Francesco Muselani, in the city in or around the 1680s, nobody could say exactly who he was or where he came from; he was variously referred to as Neapolitan, Maltese and Algerian, and it was said that he had fled from Rome after having predicted the death of the pope, from whose wrath not even Queen Christina of Sweden – with whom he had previously taken refuge – could have protected him, ‘not even being safe in her palace’. In any case his obscure past was set against an unequivocal present. The dangers in Venice must have seemed minimal to him compared to those he had escaped, if he openly declared that he did not believe in devils, hell or the next world in general. He cohabited with a woman and claimed that fornication was not a sin ‘and that Moses was a great politician, who had invented that Law himself to keep the people under his control and that he made his brother Aaron a priest, so that by making him sacrifices he had a way of earning’. Considering the range of activities in which he was involved to balance the accounts – he was an astrologer and alchemist, as well as a priest and tutor – it cannot have been difficult for him to enter and broaden his network of relationships. In a short time he had become a well-known name even beyond the broad circle of colleagues who populated the city.⁴⁷

His marked propensity for the political interpretation of facts led him in particular to achieve a some familiarity with certain gazetteers and to visit

⁴⁶ He stopped off in Venice for a few months on his way to Poland, where he intended to exploit his ability to falsify indulgences with the help of a Carmelite from Puglia, a certain Fra’ Giuseppe, more effectively: ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 110, undated letter to Nunzio from Francesco Frangiamore, read in Sant’Uffizio on 19 January 1661.

⁴⁷ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 123, trial against Francesco Muselani, spontaneous appearance by Fra’ Giovanni Ricca on 16 July 1682, cc. 2v–3r. Muselani seems to have been the inventor of a *secret* to ‘polish gold embroidery’, among many others: *ibid.*, defence deposition by Don Giuseppe Sandini on 16 September 1682, c. 17r. His clients included the Procurator of San Marco Cornaro Piscopia: *ibid.*, defence deposition by Don Giovan Battista Pax on 15 September 1682, c. 16r. Regarding his work as a tutor, he taught moral theology to Don Antonio Vadori, who for his part believed that Muselani explained those doctrines ‘for a joke, to come across as a genius’: *ibid.*, b. 123, deposition by Don Antonio Vadori on 17 December 1682, c. 23r.

Ponzio Bernardone's bookshop, which, as we shall see, was one of the main centres for gathering and circulating information, as well as the distribution of heterodox material in that period.⁴⁸ He had therefore become a familiar figure and his imprisonment by the Sant'Uffizio on 16 July 1682⁴⁹ in turn became an item to bring up when 'speaking about some news' and to ask about, with a certain amount of prejudice for the secrecy of the court, perhaps 'speaking about it by chance to the father notary from the Santo Offitio, and also to the most reverend auditor'.⁵⁰ Besides, the Abbot's opinions were already the subject of public discussion; in San Marco, Antonio Cesari, a servant from the Venier household, had referred them to Don Angelo Leone and Don Paolino Paraspari, underlining Muselani's frequently expressed opinion that 'when the body dies, the soul is dead too'. Antonia Valotti, who the abbot had stayed with for a certain amount of time, had instead spoken about them to a nobleman from the Zen family.⁵¹ It was therefore almost 'public hearsay on the streets ... that this abbot said that the soul is mortal, and that there is no purgatory or hell',⁵² just as it was 'known publicly ... that there is someone in the prison of the Holy Office known as the abbot ... who said the above-mentioned heresies'.⁵³

On 26 August 1682 Muselani told the Inquisitor that he was a 40-year-old Sicilian who had been ordained a priest in Calabria about 15 years previously. He could not prove this as he had had to flee from Naples for 'having been presumed to be a rebel in Messina [1675], because I was in the company of his Lordship the Marquis d'Arena Andrea Conclubet'. He had lived in Naples for about eight years and then in Rome for another four years, before arriving in Venice 16 months beforehand. He could not even imagine the reason for his imprisonment. He knew perfectly well that a trial was being prepared against him as long ago as July, but offering such a clear proof of the thinness of the courtroom walls instead of silently leaving the city while he was still able to cannot have benefited his cause very much. Changing his life story at least three times probably did not help him greatly either. His line of defence was essentially based on possible misunderstandings of speeches he had made in public, which he claimed were always based on the utmost orthodoxy: 'it must be a misunderstanding on the part of someone who has testified against me or

⁴⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 123, spontaneous appearance by Fra' Giovanni Ricca on 16 July 1682, cc. 2v–3r. Regarding the attendance in Bernardone's *bottega*: *ibid.*, spontaneous appearance by Don Giuseppe Mauccio on 11 August 1682, c. 5v.

⁴⁹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 123, court session of 21 July 1682.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, spontaneous appearance by Don Giuseppe Mauccio on 11 August 1682, c. 5v.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, deposition by Don Angelo Antonio Leone on 13 August 1682, c. 6v.

⁵² *Ibid.*, deposition by Don Ruggero Caetani on 20 August 1682, c. 7r.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, deposition by Corrado Pescari on 25 August 1682, c. 7v.

because of ignorance or spite'.⁵⁴ He had always discussed theological matters 'in public'. He often used this expression, almost as a way of indicating the normal daily nature of the practice. The witnesses he called to exculpate him, however, were not up to the task, given that in addition to not clearing him, they almost triggered new proceedings against him as a cheat.⁵⁵ After being tortured on 18 June 1683 and steadfastly maintaining that 'I never uttered such horrendous infamy and I've never been an atheist', on 23 June he was sentenced to remain in prison at the will of the court.⁵⁶

The constant influx of similar people guaranteed a turnover and constant supply of heterodox ideas. The people who brought them were an uncertain mix of different professional figures like Muselani or more overtly adventurers, travellers, apostates or unfrocked friars, all attracted by the freedom offered by Venice. It was such a well-known phenomenon that the fact that secular or clerical repression affected so many people was met with amazement and irritation. Pietro Giannone, who was an especially extraordinary case in point, simply could not understand why he had been banished from the city: 'As if I were the only example! And that in Venice, which they called a container for all kinds of dirt as it offers refuge to all the criminals.'⁵⁷

He was not entirely wrong. Take, for example, the protection granted by the government and the Duke of Mantua to Bolognese Counts Girolamo and Alvisi Malvasia from the 1670s onwards.⁵⁸ They were on the run from the Inquisitions in Rome and Bologna and were notorious bandits, 'characters capable of any resolved undertaking and men used to plotting, and powerful, and are in contact with the most violent men'.⁵⁹ Thanks to their diplomatic support they enjoyed so

⁵⁴ Ibid., declaration by Muselani on 10 September 1682, c. 12v.

⁵⁵ Ibid., defence deposition by Don Domenico Benedetti on 15 September 1682, c. 15v.

⁵⁶ Ibid., torture session on 18 June 1683, c. 25v, and sentence of 23 June 1683, c.n.n., in which he is found 'guilty by this Santo Offitio'. There is no abjuration.

⁵⁷ Pietro Giannone, *La vita di Pietro Giannone*, S. Bertelli (ed.) (Turin: Einaudi-Ricciardi, 1977), p. 293. See also Giuseppe Ricuperati, *L'esperienza civile e religiosa di Pietro Giannone* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1970), pp. 512–15 and a more recent work by the same author, *La città terrena di Pietro Giannone. Un itinerario tra 'crisi della coscienza europea' e illuminismo radicale* (Florence: Olschki, 2001), pp. 27–9. It was still a city, wrote Casanova, 'where a hundred resources kept alive people who could live nowhere else except by begging': Giacomo Casanova, *History of My Life* (Baltimore MA: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), vol. 12, p. 238.

⁵⁸ In Venice they went by the names of Domenico and Vincenzo: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 682, note attached to report by the officer of the Consiglio di Dieci Pietro Valotti on 24 March 1685.

⁵⁹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 567, report by Onorato Castelnovo on 3 September 1681.

much freedom that they were able to organize the escape of Judaizer Emanuele Passarino (or Giuda Vega) from the prisons of the Sant'Uffizio in Bologna and welcome him to Venice,⁶⁰ where they lived surrounded by a small group – or 'a large *ridotto*, given over to illegal trading' – of bandits and heterodox believers of all kinds.⁶¹ Their protection must have temporarily failed in March 1685 when they were forced to leave by order of the Inquisitors of State. However, by December 1687 they were already able to return to the Republic without facing many problems.⁶²

Monsignor Pietro Gabrieli was also convinced that he would arrive in the city with few problems in October 1708 and duly did so. He had distinguished himself in Rome together with a Calabrian, Antonio Oliva, for having created the Accademia dei Bianchi, which had seriously unnerved the *Congregazione del Sant'Uffizio* as well as keeping it busy. According to public hearsay the members met at Gabrieli's house, where the most terrible things happened, a curious

⁶⁰ To this end they corrupted the prison guard, promising to take him with them. They kept their word, but killed him when they arrived in Mantua: ASV, *Collegio, Esposizioni Roma*, reg. 44, 13 July 1674, cc. 134v–135v.

⁶¹ See ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 567, report by Onorato Castelnovo on 28 January 1683 and ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, trial 'of 21 August 1707'. The constant requests from Rome about handing over the pair were destined to remain ignored: as Nunzio Pompeo Varese had already asked for them in 1674 without success, three years later his successor Carlo Francesco Airoidi must have learnt his lesson. Encouraged to pursue the same goal by Rome, he answered that it was a pointless undertaking, that he had not even spoken about it in the Collegio, not only because the Venetian authorities would have listened to him purely out of politeness but also because someone could have warned the two brothers and helped them to escape before capture, seeing that they benefited from the protection of the highest nobility: ASVat, *Segreteria di Stato, Venezia*, b. 117, dispatch from the Nunzio of 24 April 1677, c. 173r. Interest in the Malvasias stemmed from a letter sent to them from Rome on 17 April 1677: 'It is understood from a good place that those knights from Bologna from the house of Malvasia practise freely in Venice, the same ones that were tried and sentenced by the Santo Offitio, for serious excesses, as this father inquisitor is informed. Therefore as the due reverence has not been shown towards this supreme court, his Holiness wants you to suggest the most suitable things to do to the assistants of this court of the holy inquisition, and make sure first that all this is true, make a provision for suitable measures, in the hope that the piety of these gentlemen will not allow or conceal such serious debauchery': *ibid.*, c. 16v. The same Congregation of the Sant'Uffizio repeatedly intervened, mobilizing all available channels to no avail. See, for example, the attempts orchestrated between Rome, Aquileia and Venice in ACDF, S.O., *Decreta 1676*, c. 25v, 5 February; c. 36r, 18 February; c. 42r, 26 February; c. 49v, 4 March; cc. 54r–55r, 11 March; 88r–91r, 22 April 1676. For an overview of the matter, see ACDF, *St. St.*, LL 5-g, cc. 140rff. Patrimonial matters linked to the confiscation of the two brothers' property continued until at least 1692: ACDF, S.O., *Decreta 1692*, c. 395r, 2 December 1692.

⁶² ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 22 December 1687.

mix of 'atheism and Mohammedanism', with lots of sacrifices to the devil and magical rites. It was even suggested that they had tried to make Pope Innocent XI die through witchcraft. It was probably more a question of meetings between people characterized by some interest in the philosophy of Spinoza, which Gabrieli had perhaps come into contact with during a trip to Holland, while the ubiquitous suspicion of Quietism that weighed on the group was perhaps not completely unfounded. Oliva's involvement cannot have been entirely reassuring, given that he had participated in the Calabrian revolt of 1647 and seemed to be encouraging certain openly anti-papal discourses. In any case the group expressed strong heterodox tendencies, presumably influenced by the underlying libertinism that characterized its members: in the words of Giorgio Spini, a 'radical naturalistic immorality'. The group was discovered in 1689 and probably suffered as a result of the rigorous line against heterodoxy typical of Alexander VIII.⁶³ The guilty parties were arrested and Oliva committed suicide.⁶⁴ The others were all sent to different prisons. One of them, a certain Giuseppe Pignata, escaped in an adventurous manner by boarding a French ship in Civitavecchia and taking refuge in France.⁶⁵ Here he wrote an account of his escape, which included some details of the philosophical debates held in the sect. There was a lot of discussion about Gabrieli's fate. The Sant'Uffizio met regularly, confirmation that the case had a certain importance. It was decided to spare his life out of respect for his family, which was fairly well known, make him abjure privately in his cell and imprison him in Perugia rather than San Leo,

⁶³ On the figure of Alexander VIII, the Venetian Pietro Ottoboni, see Armando Petrucci, *ad vocem*, in *DBI* and Antonio Menniti Ippolito, *Fortuna e sfortune di una famiglia veneziana nel Seicento. Gli Ottoboni al tempo dell'aggregazione al patriziato* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 1996), in particular pp. 142–65. A member of the Sant'Uffizio, clashing with Innocent XI, Ottoboni was one of the main supporters of the relentless fight against Quietism.

⁶⁴ There is an account of the events relating to the Bianchi in Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, pp. 363–5. See Olindo Guerrini, *Le avventure di Giuseppe Pignata fuggito dalle carceri dell'Inquisizione di Roma* (Palermo: Sellerio editore, 1990). See also Maria Pia Donato, *Morti improvisi. Medicina e religione nel Settecento* (Rome: Carocci, 2011). The escape text is accompanied by writings by Alessandro d'Ancona, *La fuga di Giuseppe Pignata*, which supplies a series of information on the protagonists and the intellectual environment in which the Academy's experience developed. The summary of the trial is in ACDF, *St. St.*, UV 6, cc. 1r–222v. On Pignata, see also Charles Klopp, 'Giuseppe Pignata, 17th-Century Virtual Author', *Pluralism & Critical Practice: Essays in Honor of Albert N. Mancini, Italiana*, 8 (1999): 185–93 and *Sentences: The Memoirs and Letters of Italian Political Prisoners from Benvenuto Cellini to Aldo Moro* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

⁶⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 588, report by Abbot Chierichelli on 21 November 1693.

which had been the initial proposal.⁶⁶ After 17 years of imprisonment in the Holy Office prisons and a variety of monasteries in Rome and Urbino, Gabrieli arrived in Venice in 1708 after managing to escape.

Gabrieli's escape must have been a serious cause of concern for the papal authorities, enough for them to feel it was necessary to ask for the help of the French and Spanish ambassadors to catch him and conduct him to Ferrara. His luck, however, experienced an upturn in Venice, at least for the time being. Arriving with a substantial escort consisting of men in the service of the Imperial ambassador, who clearly cannot have been completely extraneous to the event, he found that he could benefit from the protection of the Republic and was able to rent a palace on the Grand Canal and move around the city with reasonable ease.⁶⁷ He continued his association with the ambassador and frequented circles of gazetteers in lay dress, making friends with Giacomo Torri, a *reportista* (newswriter). When the latter died, Gabrieli inherited his papers, which contained among other things plans and drawings for innovative firearms. It seems that the sale of these guaranteed him a good income and a dignified life.⁶⁸

Daily meetings

This picture of troubled lives and heterodox motifs, which was quite complex, although mostly below the surface, was constantly enriched by elements that intervened to give new shape and new models of expression to the ways of belief and non-belief in the city. Its proximity to Padua, for example, led to a constant influx of students – already in a normal state of restlessness from their socio-professional status, but also frequently from Reformation areas or educated at the school of Cesare Cremonini and Antonio Rocco – thereby ensuring that learned theories effectively infiltrated classes that should have theoretically been

⁶⁶ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 588, reports by Abbot Chierichelli on 24 August, 6 November and 22 December 1691, 9 and 16 February and 15 March 1692.

⁶⁷ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 601, report by Bernardino Garbinati on 4 October 1708.

⁶⁸ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 635, report by Rinaldo Tardini on 13 December 1709. The Inquisitors of State were interested in these drawings and managed to get copies of plans for a cannon. It was 'a beautiful drawing of a cannon, which will last forever. It was the invention of a certain Mr Girolamo Capponago, a Fleming, who was Sergeant-Major in battle for this republic, and that he gave the said new invention to the public, who found it excellent and had it made at the Arsenal, where it is still made, and he also boasts ... Gabrielli that with this invention they also made those to be shown to the King of Denmark'. The Danish sovereign was in Venice during 1708 and the Republic offered to give him some cannons that he had seen being made in the Arsenal. See ASV, *Senato Mar*, b. 800, cc. 297v–298r, 6 February 1708. Thanks to Guido Candiani for the reference.

excluded from them. The same innate characteristics of the city also enabled contact and fusion; the strong presence of non-Catholic religious communities provided the opportunity to meet numerous individuals who might believe in something different or not believe at all, thereby favouring the exchange and assimilation of fragments of heterodoxy.⁶⁹

Daily contact with members of the Jewish community, for example, revealed a form of religious alterity that was variously condemned, but towards which it was permissible to feel a degree of curiosity. For example, the compiler of *Pallade veneta*, a widely read manuscript journal, focused on the festivals and rites celebrated in the Ghetto at length on a weekly basis. He illustrated and explained them accurately before quickly taking refuge in considerations of the futility of such practices, on account of the underlying infidelity of these people, who were sentenced to damnation. He stigmatized the superstitious nature of the rituals but continued to describe them in minute detail, almost as if he knew that he was addressing a readership attracted by the exotic charm (although reprehensible) which they exuded.⁷⁰

It was thus not rare for Christians to attend rabbinical sermons: in 1682, for example, Don Filippo da Monteleone and Abbot Francesco Muselani met in the synagogue. They must have listened to the rabbi attentively, because when 'he said that the passage from Holy Scripture: he saw three and adored one, which indicated the Holy Trinity and only one God, was not in their Bible, but had been added by Saint Jerome', the abbot 'confirmed what the Jew said, namely that it was an addition made by Saint Jerome'.⁷¹ There was certainly no lack of

⁶⁹ 'The study and assimilation of themes and motifs of the Jewish and Islamic traditions provided new and more effective weapons against Christian faith': Silvia Berti, 'At the Roots of Unbelief', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 4 (1995): 555–75, at p. 565. On the presence of foreigners in Venice and the religious organization of different communities in this period, see Giorgio Fedalto, 'Stranieri a Venezia e a Padova. 1550–1700', in *Storia della cultura veneta. Il Seicento* (10 vols, Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1982), vol. 4/II, pp. 251–79; Luca Molà and Reinhold Mueller, 'Essere straniero a Venezia nel tardo Medioevo: accoglienza e rifiuto nei privilegi di cittadinanza e nelle sentenze criminali', in Simonetta Cavaciocchi (ed.), *Le migrazioni in Europa, secc. XIII–XVIII* (Prato: Le Monnier, 1993), pp. 839–51; Donatella Calabi and Paola Lanaro, 'Le forme della separazione', in Donatella Calabi and Paola Lanaro (eds), *La città italiana e i luoghi degli stranieri* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1988), pp. vii–xix. More recently, see Andrea Zannini, *Venezia città aperta. Gli stranieri e la Serenissima, XIV–XVIII sec.* (Venice: Marcianum Press, 2009).

⁷⁰ See as an example, *Pallade veneta dal sabato 7 sin al sabato 14 ottobre 1702 and dal sabato 27 settembre sin al sabato 4 ottobre 1710*, conserved in ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 713.

⁷¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 123, trial against Francesco Muselani, spontaneous appearance by Fra' Giovanni Ricca on 16 July 1682, c. 3r.

public opportunities of this type, but personal relationships were even more frequent. These were linked to business openings or were purely casual in nature. Often, however, this type of contact was not limited to conversations, but found other ways to interest a greater number of people and thereby leave a lasting impression. One example is the conversations that took place in 1648 between Luca del Moro, a paint seller, and a Jew whose name was not given during the trial. The Jew was a frequent visitor to Luca's shop near the Rialto Bridge and he often discussed matters of faith (or rather faiths) with the owner when other customers were present. They naturally did not always agree, and on at least one occasion he said to Luca: 'if you knew what a certain chapter in the Bible says, you wouldn't be speaking to me like this'.

The chapter in question was Deuteronomy 13, with the same fierce attack against the seduction of idolatry that Pietro Manelfi had indicated as the bedrock of Anabaptist Radical Christology. In a conversation which took place in Vicenza in the first half of 1550, the reading of a passage from the book led to the question of whether Christ was God or a man. According to Manelfi, in order to solve the question they decided to summon the Anabaptist ministers to a council, which established in September 1550 that 'Christ is not God but a man conceived from the seed of Joseph and Mary, although he is full of all the virtues of God'.⁷² Now, 100 years later, turning to the same source, a Jew was able to put forward the same conclusions in a semi-public discussion. The Jew left the trader a note with the precise reference so that he would not forget it.⁷³ It seems that he also told him to 'go and see in that chapter what the Christ you worship as God really is'. Not having a Bible available, Luca probably asked for an explanation from a preacher, who then asked for the note and publicly attacked the Jew's insolence during a sermon in the church of San Cassan, accusing him of having publicly claimed that 'the miracles worked by our Lord Jesus Christ are false, as if they were done by a magician and not by God'.⁷⁴

⁷² Carlo Ginzburg, *I costituti di don Pietro Manelfi* (Florence and Chicago: Newberry Library, 1970), pp. 34–5 and John J. Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies: Italian Heretics in a Renaissance City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 106. In the mid-seventeenth century Deuteronomy was perhaps the most frequently discussed book in the Bible and its authenticity was questioned by Hobbes, La Peyrere and Simon, among others. Inconsistencies within the text had already frequently been signalled in the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century: Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), in particular pp. 189, 194 and 232–5.

⁷³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 103, Giustina Sugolota file, deposition by Luca del Moro on 9 July 1648.

⁷⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 103, spontaneous appearance by Pietro Caimo on 9 June 1648. The bulletin is enclosed with the deeds, which probably means that the friar was also heard but that his words were not recorded.

The libertine arguments of a false legislator and Christ's miracles as the work of a magician and therefore devoid of divine origins were thus brought to an audience that was able to assimilate them easily in a completely safe context, due to the fully orthodox setting in which they were expressed. The fact that the preacher refuted them or limited himself to presenting them by calling them too abominable to waste time over, as anyone would have realized their wickedness, clearly did not prevent people from removing them from this context, with the predictable result of arousing curiosity and generating new discussions.

In a social circle like this, which was not even especially underground, it cannot have been difficult to find ways and instruments to use for the dual purpose of building alternative beliefs and simply rejecting existing ones. Due to its urban and social characteristics, Venice acted as a reservoir for different forms of heterodoxy; they could be used on the spot or, as often happened, by moving elsewhere and applying them in the most appropriate place. The Calabrian Don Pietro Giordano, for example, was one of many who found stimuli and ideas in Venice. He collected them and then moved on to Motta di Livenza, in the diocese of Ceneda, where in the summer of 1689 he tried to create a sect that he educated in keeping with a *Credo* amended more or less in the following terms: 'Credo in Deum, et in Petrum Giordanum.' He had travelled and lived in Germany, Holland and England, and boasted that he 'had served the Prince of Orange'. Although he celebrated Mass regularly, he had never seen a papal bull, and although he was elderly he gave the impression of being fairly inexperienced with regard to the rite of the Mass. He seems to have won great favour by suggesting that the beginning of the Gospel of John was 'almost all from Plato, and this error induced and is still inducing a lot of people against the Catholic doctrine'. He had procured an obscure booklet in Venice, whose author he never wanted to reveal and about which little was known apart from the fact that it had been printed in Amsterdam. He showed this text to his sect followers and to 'religious people' whenever he argued with them.⁷⁵

Venice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was therefore an ideal environment for acquiring ideas easily, putting them to the test and renewing one's ideological arsenal. There were infinite opportunities for listening to different voices which, as they were often intertwined, whispered or muddled,

⁷⁵ It might have had some connection with St Augustine's thinking, as Giordano was heavily influenced by a passage from *Confessions*, 9.7. Although critics claimed that 'it stretches the text to the point of mutilation', philology cannot have been a priority for the inhabitants of Motta, given that Giordano's opinions spread rapidly, so much so that the Inquisitor from Ceneda went to the villa in person, with unknown results: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, Melchiorre Satellico file, trial against Don Pietro Giordano, spontaneous appearance by Don Francesco Longo on 14 July 1689.

created and constantly rebuilt a web of heterodox ideas given a purely negative connotation; it was enough that they were separate from official Catholicism. Fuelled as much by other opinions as by the written word, they found ways to be heard in different contexts. When taken individually, their suggestions did not actually differ that much from the heterodox repertoire that had been in circulation since the previous century. It was usual to hear someone expressing his anger at the saints, or rather at those who confided in them, but these affirmations were no longer included in the Reformation outlook and had somehow become separate and self-sustaining. The people who pronounced them felt less Calvinist than the Inquisitor thought. It was clearly possible to question and reject certain aspects of the dogma of faith such as the intercession of the saints and even recognize that ‘in our faith and in our law there is lots of nonsense’, yet continue to profess to be Catholic.⁷⁶ Mainly, however, they attempted to differentiate themselves from orthodoxy and express their aversion to it vociferously if necessary. It was in this climate that a new vocabulary of dissent was built.

Internal circulation

By adopting a broad simplification, we can say that the spread of heterodox ideas occurred in two ways. It mainly followed a horizontal path consisting of informal personal relationships and discussions, in which the cultural stimulus was absorbed and negotiated personally in dialectical terms. There was, however, also a vertical path that included readings, assemblies and public events, in which the receptive phase was predominant and the phases involving personal interpretation and discussion were postponed. It is clear that these two methods constantly intertwined, overlapped and interacted, as heterodox ideas were formed by recomposing fragments of different origins so that they could reverberate against each other. Concepts found in a book could be reiterated in discussions in the street, just as they could be reinforced when elements were found in readings or confirmed by other sources. The result was a constantly evolving system of the attribution and structuring of meaning, positioned among a wide variety of means of communication. In some way, ‘The making of meaning occurs at street level as well as in books. The shaping of public opinion takes place in markets and taverns as well as in *sociétés de pensée*’.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 136, trial against Davide Ricioi, deposition by Giuseppe Giusto on 27 April 1713.

⁷⁷ Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: Norton, 1995), p. 180.

Casimire Freschot was a Frenchman who stayed in Venice between the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century. He wrote a report on the city, the first few pages of which are devoted to defending it against the traditional accusations of impiety and atheism. He then tells of something that had struck him with regard to a common custom during carnival time in Venice, ‘un des plus particuliers, et qui asseurement ne se trouve nulle part ailleurs’. He had noted that on these occasions

... many Italians from every order and state, among the most notable and able who, taking advantage of fancy dress, climb onto the stalls of charlatans or astrologers that predict the future ... and rant about their knowledge, causing arguments between those present, who more often than not do not even know each other. Every order and state is represented, because among them there are very often monks and clergymen in large numbers who, although serious and austere on other occasions, there lose all reserve and express in public the most recondite convictions about the strangest most sensitive matters.

The issues tackled included philosophy, morality, politics and even religion:

... because as Italians couldn't express their opinions freely, and as their spirit was full of doubts and indecision induced by the slackness that is innate to them, violated and bound by the rigour of the law and fear of the Inquisition, they seize their first opportunity, and fancy dress is undoubtedly the best one because what they say in these disputes has no dangerous consequences.

One of these disputes stood out in Freschot's memory. A Jew described as ‘athée de profession’ discussed extremely delicate and dangerous matters with such skill that it seemed ‘que le diable n’a jamais peut etre eu d’apotre d’une plus grande efficace que celui là’. He spoke in public and people lingered to listen to him. Some even tried to answer back and the overall atmosphere created was strange for the Frenchman. They argued about a ‘theatre de charlatans’ of the most important points in religion, with arguments that one would have struggled to find even in the most prestigious schools of philosophy. On the same occasion he heard someone say that he had been a Jesuit and who offered some ‘nice hearsay’ – speeches of overblown eloquence on philosophical matters – which he had learnt by heart. He called himself *Incognito villano* (the ‘Unknown peasant’) and under this guise held forth about prime matter, universals and being in general:

... and of all the precious trifles that they cause to sparkle before the eyes of children in schools, as if they were things animated by the purest spirit of philosophy and

that, dressed up in the pompous ornamentation of words composed for the occasion, directed the attention of spectators towards people who, on that good occasion, made an incredibly inane impression, because these orators were held in very high esteem, and did homage to such pleasant illusions without expecting anything in return.⁷⁸

The situation described by Freschot was probably anything but unusual. Indeed, it must have been quite common if in January 1670 the Sant'Uffizio ordered its Captain to prevent the preaching of 'that poor herbalist who preaches in the square with blasphemy and heresy, even though this Santo Offizio has already prohibited the same man from doing so'.⁷⁹

The fact that it was possible to reach a vast and varied audience and offer them theories which were at the margins of orthodoxy or fully heterodox in an institutionalized context such as a public speech was one of the vehicles for the propagation of unbelief in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There was certainly no lack of such public opportunities to spread elements of doubt about faith if a Jew or a herbalist could climb onto a table or an improvised stage, in the manner of a charlatan, to expound truths to 'idiotic people' made

⁷⁸ Casimire Freschot, *Nouvelle relation de la ville et république de Venise, divisée en trois parties, dont la première contient son histoire générale; la seconde traite du gouvernement et de mœurs de la nation; et la troisième donne connoissance de toutes les familles patrices, employées dans le gouvernement* (Utrecht: Marchand Libraire, 1709), pp. 425–7. The defence of Venice, on pp. 372–4, is basically a controversial stance and a response to the book by Abraham Nicolas Amelot de la Houssaye, *Histoire du gouvernement de Venise*, F. Leonard (ed.) (Paris: Imprimeur ordinaire du Roy et du Clergé de France, 1676). Amelot de la Houssaye was the assistant to the French ambassador in Venice, Nicolas Prunier de Saint-Andrè, between 1668 and 1671. The book was very popular and the author also spent a spell in prison because of it. It was one of the texts used as a foundation for the creation of the 'black legend' of Venice, which became especially popular during the eighteenth century. See Piero Del Negro, 'Forme ed istituzioni del discorso politico veneziano', in *Storia della cultura veneta. Il Seicento* (10 vols, Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1982), vol. 4/II, pp. 406–36; Franco Gaeta, 'Venezia da "stato misto ad aristocrazia esemplare"', in *Storia della cultura veneta. Il Seicento*, vol. 4/II, pp. 437–94; Mario Infelise, 'Intorno alla leggenda nera di Venezia nella prima metà dell'800', in *Venezia e l'Austria* (Venice: Marsilio, 1999), pp. 309–21; Christian Del Vento and Xavier Tabet (eds) *Le mythe de Venise au XIX siècle. Débats historiographiques et représentations littéraires* (Caen: Presses universitaires de Caen, 2006); Claudio Povolo, 'The Creation of Venetian Historiography', in John Martin and Dennis Romano (eds), *Venice Reconsidered. The History and Civilization of an Italian State, 1297–1797* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), pp. 491–519; Filippo de Vivo, 'Quand le passé résiste à ses historiographies: Venise et le XVIIe siècle', *Cahiers du Centre de Recherches Historiques*, 28–9 (2002): 223–34.

⁷⁹ ASV, Sant'Uffizio, b. 151, *Miscellanea processi*, session on 23 January 1670, report by the Captain of the Sant'Uffizio Belforetto.

up of philosophical doctrines that were sometimes even complex. In 1739 an ‘anonymous charlatan’, probably a similar figure to Freschot’s ‘Incognito villano’, used Campo Santa Maria Formosa to offer a lengthy reply to a question put to him by the audience about whether ‘the soul can move when separated from the body’. The audience were both interested and involved, and stayed to listen to his answer. The fact that they were not at all surprised by the nature of the question or the content of the answer strongly suggests a considerable degree of familiarity with similar situations.⁸⁰

There was a range of opportunities for transmitting potentially dangerous messages, even if they were only implicit. Representations of the practical consequences of thoughts were circulated as well as the thoughts themselves. In particular, matters of sex were one of the motifs which heterodox discourse focused on with greater insistence. Catholic restrictions, seen as constraints against nature, were often contested on the basis of a variety of considerations with different degrees of theological foundation. As we will see later on, the result was a widespread climate in which the concept of sexual sin was rejected, or at least drastically reduced in scope. Any public manifestation of free sexuality devoid of moral suppressants could therefore constitute a kind of indirect attack on orthodox positions, or at least could turn out to be a dangerous link through which a theoretical position, even if not a conscious one, could become public and represented to such an extent that a large number of people could use it easily.

For example, if it was possible to maintain a degree of albeit residual control over the sobriety of theatrical performances at public events, it was more difficult to intervene when these performances were held in unofficial unpredictable settings such as the small stages frequently set up in squares for *Commedia dell’Arte* performances. It was even more difficult when they were held inside private houses. It is well known that *Commedia dell’Arte* was one of the most common noble pastimes in villas, but even in the city during Lent in March 1682 a Malvasia seller from San Fantin was able to set up a stage to perform the play ‘The debauchery of Absalon, and his death’. Given its success – at least 300 people, a mix of men and women from all social levels, attended every performance – the makeshift impresario had to agree to a good number of repeat performances. The actors, all of whom were young:

⁸⁰ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 143, trial against Bortolo Zorzi, Girolamo Rottini and Girolamo Zandini, spontaneous appearance by Don Giovan Francesco Savioli on 10 June 1739. As we will see, similar occasions could be characterized by sermons that sometimes risked becoming vehicles of heterodoxy, given that the semi-authorized preachers were competing for an audience, trying to attract people with rhetorical artifice that was not always under control and often implied open support for heterodox theories.

most of whom were priests, make extremely lascivious speeches, and one above all, who acts under the name of Basla, David's fool ... a current comic, who acted as Coviello in the theatre of comedy in San Cassan, when speaking to the woman first makes obscene movements with his waist and then speaks in scandalous words, calling her a harlot and saying that he wants to have sex with her, speaking of sodomy, lowering himself to say these exact words: I'd willingly take her from behind. Please pardon me, since I am telling you everything.⁸¹

Some were understandably scandalized, but many more laughed and enjoyed themselves. The shows continued at length in rapid succession. If there were any initiatives to ban them, they must have been belated or ineffective.

Places

Joseph Addison said that his biggest ambition was to use *The Spectator* to move centres of thought development from the traditionally assigned places to the culture of the new centres of sociability that were evolving all over Europe: 'It was said of Socrates that he brought Philosophy down from heaven, to inhabit among men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought Philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-houses.' Addison wrote these words in London in issue 10 of his journal, which came out on Monday 12 March 1711.⁸² Sociability centres in which culture was created and consumed were identified as circles, meeting places and public places, above all coffee houses. The formulation and expression of dissent, as well as the forms and ways in which it was distributed, were therefore also a question of place and area, which presented themselves in an appreciably different way in Venice compared to other urban settings. Space was more restricted, contact was very frequent and there were more opportunities for discussion as a result of the chances to meet people. At the same time contact between people belonging to different social groups was a daily occurrence because of the obvious topographical factors, which established 'a form of sociality that was necessarily completely focused on the open air, the outdoors'.⁸³

⁸¹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 567, report by Onorato Castelnovo on 19 March 1682.

⁸² Joseph Addison, *The Spectator: A New Edition, Reproducing the Original Text Both As First Issued and As Corrected by its Authors*, H. Morley (ed.) (2 vols, London: George Routledge and Sons, 1891), vol. 1, n. 10, Monday, 12 March 1711, p. 41.

⁸³ Renzo Derosas, 'Moralità e giustizia a Venezia nel '500–'600. Gli esecutori contro la bestemmia', in Gaetano Cozzi (ed.), *Stato società e giustizia nella Repubblica veneta (sec.*

Ideas that had been created in the city or had somehow entered it therefore found extremely fertile terrain and spread with surprising rapidity, evolving and changing along the way. They crept into discussions in the street, in coffee houses and *botteghe di acquavite* (spirit shops), sermons, confessions and private conversations, before withdrawing into houses and starting to live under their own steam. When they were removed from their context, adapted and blended with others, together they formed a chaotic set which was difficult to define except in its individual parts.

In public

In inns like the *Istriana* or the *Leon bianco* ‘one can associate with Germans and find friends’.⁸⁴ Here one could learn that everyone could be saved, whether Lutheran, Catholic or Jewish, that God had suffered as much for them as for the Catholics, and that there was no difference between heaven and elsewhere.⁸⁵ On the boat which connected Padua to Venice, a doctor and a friar could be overheard discussing agriculture and the existence or non-existence of fire in hell.⁸⁶ In the *Palazzo ducale* the palace lawyers discussed and argued about the lawfulness of sexual relations.⁸⁷ Prisoners in jail could learn about the theory of the transmigration of souls from a priest. Furthermore, all confessions were good, but the most ‘rigorous’ ones were even more so; although Catholics and Protestants belonged to the same religion, confessions by Protestants were more worthy as they were more ‘rigorous’.⁸⁸

XV–XVIII) (Rome: Jouvence, 1980), p. 448; Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli*, pp. 292–8

⁸⁴ According to the words of reporter Giovanni Quorli in a letter in 1668: ASV, *Avogaria di Comun, Miscellanea civile*, b. 233, file 13, c. 12r, undated.

⁸⁵ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 135, trial against Giovan Battista Ospedaletti, spontaneous appearance by Giovan Battista Campigni on 8 May 1710.

⁸⁶ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 135, Don Giovanni Duroi file, trial against Filippo Serpicelli, spontaneous appearance by Fra’ Aloisio Maria Benetelli on 11 March 1711.

⁸⁷ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 136, trial against Don Agostino Ciceri and Luigi Bellati, spontaneous appearance by Giacomo Negri on 20 July 1713.

⁸⁸ The priest made ‘spiritual speeches’ every evening, with ‘the explanation of the Gospel through spiritual sermons’: ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 139, trial against Don Francesco Aguseler, deposition by Antonio Marchi on 11 September 1723, c. 3r. The images cannot have been venerated and feast days cannot have been sanctified except for Saturday: *ibid.*, spontaneous appearance by Francesco Bressanin on 31 August 1723, c. 1v. As for indulgences and jubilees, ‘they were things to deceive the people, and ... the pope granted them in order to draw out money’. The fire in hell was not real, ‘but ... it was only by way of intellect’: *ibid.*, deposition by Francesco de la Tour on 13 September 1723, c. 6r. On the equivalence of confessions and the transmigration of souls, see the deposition by Antonio Marchi, in cc. 4v and 5r respectively.

Considering the movements and characteristics of heterodox discourse, a topography of dissent is clearly unrealistic. Although it found its *raison d'être* in communication, it had good reason to stay within carefully drawn limits, albeit necessarily public ones. The features of the network included first of all meeting places, *botteghe*, centres for news distribution and then embassies, with their entourages of adventurers and travellers, before moving inside private houses, where dissent became intertwined with daily life.

Although the most concentrated trading area between Rialto and San Marco was built around haberdashery, it also featured stalls tended by copyists, gazetteers and a variety of bookshops, in addition to the omnipresent spice shops. The Rialto area was also much frequented by those who had post to send. The writing professions blossomed around these centres, where both goods and news became merchandise. The Rialto area also abounded with goldsmiths, where you could find 'many partisans who criticize most openly without any respect using concepts which deserve to be punished'.⁸⁹ A short distance away, Piazza San Marco was a lively environment, full as it was with people ready to strike up a conversation, perhaps people who were in Venice for a short time on business and were used to packing up and moving elsewhere.⁹⁰ There were street astrologers, always positioned somewhere on either side of the boundary of legality with their implicit denial of free will.⁹¹ There were also charlatans such as Giuseppe Toscani, called *l'Orvietano*, who proclaimed below the Procuratie in the 1680s that the Mass was a political invention for the benefit of ignorant

⁸⁹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 640, report on 21 May 1706. On heterodox unrest circulating among sixteenth-century goldsmiths, see Massimo Firpo, *Artisti, gioiellieri, eretici. Il mondo di Lorenzo Lotto tra Riforma e Controriforma* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2001).

⁹⁰ The square was home to the 'idle', to those who practised 'Michelazzo's trade, which consists of eating, drinking and enjoying oneself'. This description by Tommaso Garzoni, written with Bologna in mind, could also fit the Venetian situation well when amplified: 'they spend all their lives walking in the square and going from the *osteria* to the *pescaria* and from the *palazzo* to the *loggia*, not doing anything else all day but going here and there, sometimes listening to singing at the stalls, sometimes looking at bulls passing, sometimes heading for the glasses, mirrors and bells laid out in the square; sometimes drifting pointlessly around the market surrounded by boors, sometimes stopping in barbershops to tell cock and bull stories, reading aloud news, which are for the ears of idle negligent people': Tommaso Garzoni, *La piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo* (2 vols, Turin: Einaudi, 1996), vol. 2, p. 1294, speech CXVII, *Degli oziosi di piazza, ovvero del mestiero di Michelazzo*.

⁹¹ Many of them were interrogated before the Sant'Uffizio. At the end of the seventeenth century, Venice was teeming with astrologers like this. They usually set up in San Marco, but could also be found in their dozens in the other main squares. The most famous ones received at home after their success outdoors. They appear to have been in the majority men and mostly from abroad.

common people and that the soul died along with the body. Such ideas could be voiced and were indeed widely known, as they were widespread among the stalls of charlatans, which were popular among people looking for amusement, secrets, remedies and poisons.⁹² At the same time there was a cross-eyed 50-year-old Florentine, never named, who sold 'powder for making writing ink' from a stall in front of San Marco. He had been 'exiled by the Santo Offitio of Ancona and Rome ... for having been with Borri', whose well-known theories did not exactly tie in with orthodoxy but could now take root in a hidden corner of Venice thanks to the deserting disciple.⁹³

Discussions 'about philosophy' in Piazza San Marco were very much an everyday occurrence and the gatherings of people in which they took place were part of the cityscape. Michelangelo Fardella publicly claimed that confession was a 'carnage of consciences', that the pope was not infallible and that priests had usurped his authority, and that the vow of chastity was to be considered null and void.⁹⁴ While he announced the imminent printing of his 'philosophy and theology course with a new easier method in accordance with Descartes's ideas',⁹⁵ the thing that made the greatest impression on those listening was the way in which he spoke about the behaviour of priests during the Eucharist: they behaved like 'a cat with a mouse, which waits, plays and then eats it'.⁹⁶ It is true

⁹² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 122, trial against Giuseppe Toscani, written charge by Don Antonio Mazzaffi presented on 17 February 1682 and depositions by Giovan Battista Cociolo on 5 March and Francesco Beati on 10 March 1682.

⁹³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 123, Angela Gaudente file, trial against Anna Maria Miani, deposition by Antonio Merati on 3 July 1685. On the blend of heterodox and esoteric doctrines that led Borri to be the Church's quintessential enemy for a long time, see Salvatore Rotta in *DBI*, *ad vocem*. Rotta's materials were taken up again and reworked by Giorgio Cosmacini, *Il medico ciarlatano. Vita inimitabile di un europeo del Seicento* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1998).

⁹⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, trial against Fra' Michelangelo Fardella, spontaneous appearance by Don Filippo Caminetti on 28 April 1689.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, deposition by Fra' Domenico Ripetta before the Inquisitor of Mantua on 23 June 1689.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, deposition by Don Francesco da Messina on 2 June 1689. The trial against Fardella, one of the leading Italian mathematicians and Cartesians, did not have direct consequences for the defendant, but its effects cannot have worn off completely as it was picked up again in 1693. The Inquisitor noted down the heretical propositions attributed to the friar during questioning in 1689 and compiled a list of witnesses to be heard. It is possible that this act was connected in some way to Fardella's request to leave the order: *ibid.*, document dated 23 November 1693. On Fardella in general, see Franco Aurelio Meschini in *DBI*, *ad vocem*; Andre Robinet, *L'empire leibnizien. La conquête de la chaire de mathématiques de l'université de Padoue. Jacob Hermann et Nicolas Bernoulli (1707–1719)* (Trieste: Lint, 1991), which includes many documents from the archive; in ASV, *Riformatori dello studio di*

here and in other cases that the particular features of oral communication must also be considered.⁹⁷ It cannot be excluded that the more esoteric intellectual paths were subjected to a process of trivialization when unleashed, especially in certain circumstances. However, these discourses in turn became starting points for personal and often original reflections, thus generating new discourses. The fact that Fardella could speak publicly about his propositions and convictions before a socially and culturally mixed group of listeners is an example of how far the opportunities for receiving heterodox messages resulting from learned interpretations could extend. It was perhaps precisely thanks to this type of filter and mediation, which started in the late sixteenth century at the latest, that unbelief and forms of dissent equipped with arguments deemed to be part of the *libertinage érudit* did not spread ‘only at the top, among small restricted circles of “strong spirits”, initiated in the sophistication of philosophy from Padua’, but in a much broader way ‘running underground in much larger circles’.⁹⁸ Doctrines felt to be pertinent to a few had started to extend their influence to broad groups of the population, spreading widely not only as a result of the work of philosophers, scholars and writers but also of soldiers, ‘as well as through the language of merchants, businessmen, diplomats, couriers, dispatch bearers or heralds of war’.⁹⁹ There was therefore an infinite series of links and filters that favoured the deep-set penetration and wide assimilation of the heterodox message, producing discourses, words and languages that became part of the growing trend for debate, the increasingly widespread distribution of information and the parallel increase in meeting places and sociability. The number of opportunities for receiving and exchanging ideas and propositions of

Padova, b. 4, there is a handwritten *curriculum vitae*. The trial was published by Antonio De Stefano, ‘Un processo dell’Inquisizione veneziana contro Michelangelo Fardella’, *Siculorum Gymnasium*, 1 (1941): 133–46.

⁹⁷ In addition to this aspect, it has been underlined how ‘ideas expressed orally are much more easily misconstrued than those written down, hence further stimulating the conflation of the real and the exaggerated that atheist accusations embodied’: Michael Hunter, ‘Science and Heterodoxy: An Early Modern Problem Reconsidered’, in David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman (eds), *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 439–60, at p. 446.

⁹⁸ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, p. 128. Cesare Vasoli spoke of ‘a long tradition of unbelief, present at every different level of society and the culture of the time and certainly strengthened by the benevolent welcome given in some academic environments, as well as in noble salons and *ridotti* (gaming houses), to the most radical sixteenth-century philosophical doctrines, namely those by Pomponazzi and Cardano or ... Giordano Bruno’: ‘Vanini e il suo processo per ateismo’, p. 132.

⁹⁹ Sergio Zoli, *L’Europa libertina* (Florence: Nardini editore, 1997), p. 19.

any kind, although they were often connected to matters of faith, had gradually grown and become uncontrollable.

The speed at which elements of this ‘highbrow’ philosophical debate could be circulated is an important aspect of the propagation of dissent, which mostly happened through the spoken rendering of written philosophical discourse. A certain degree of knowledge of the problems, acquired first hand from texts, was indeed fairly common, at least in some social groups and for debates involving champions of orthodoxy. While Abbot Giovanni Schenza ‘uses a variety of arguments and syllogisms to prove that there is no purgatory’¹⁰⁰ in the 1670s, in 1710 Don Pietro Buora, a priest at the nobleman Zen’s house in Riva de Biasio, ‘referred the opinion that the world existed before Adam, and said that this opinion was validated by the authority of certain ancient inscriptions found in China’. He completely rejected the validity of the objection by the Catholic Church, which considered Chinese years to be shorter.¹⁰¹ The priest’s work in the nobleman’s house must have given him a good opportunity to spread his ideas, which he expressed in the presence of priests and laymen, even those of

¹⁰⁰ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 120, trial against Giovanni Schenza, spontaneous appearance by Francesco Picco on 20 April 1679.

¹⁰¹ The problem of ‘Chinese chronology’, which played a role of major importance in theological and philosophical debates during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was raised by the same missionaries who discovered the existence of annals and documents that dated the origins of Chinese civilization to times well before the creation of Adam. This inconsistency was used by Isaac La Peyrère who, in *Praeadamitae sive exercitatio super versibus 12, 13 et 14 capitis V epistolae Pauli ad Romanos, quibus inducuntur primi homines ante Adamum conditi*, s.l., 1655 and *Systema theologicum ex praeadamitarum hypothesis, pars prima*, s.l., 1655, proposed the idea that Adam was only the progenitor of the Jews and not of all humanity, thereby developing the pre-Adamite theory. Chronological arguments, which were not completely new – among others, Giordano Bruno had already used them – were widely used in a critical capacity to deny any validity to Scripture. On the Roman side, half-hearted attempts were made to prove that Chinese years were shorter than biblical years. The Biblicist Richard Simon subsequently showed how these documents had no firm historical validity. On this matter, see in general Paolo Rossi, *I segni del tempo. Storia del tempo e storia delle nazioni da Hooke a Vico* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1979) and Fausto Parente, ‘Isaac de La Peyrère e Richard Simon. Osservazioni preliminari ad uno studio del ms. Chantilly, Musée de Consé, n. 191 (698)’, in Domenico Ferraro and Gianna Gigliotti (eds), *La geografia dei saperi. Scritti in memoria di Dino Pastine* (Florence: Le Lettere, 2000), pp. 161–82. On the use that La Peyrère made of it, see Richard Popkin, *Isaac La Peyrère: His Life, Work, Influence* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1987); Dino Pastine, ‘Era Lapeyrère un libertino?’, in Sergio Bertelli (ed.), *Il libertinismo in Europa* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1980), pp. 305–18; Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics* (2 vols, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Elisabeth Quennehen, ‘Lapeyrère, la Chine et la chronologie biblique’, *La Lettre clandestine*, 9 (2000): 243–55.

low status.¹⁰² In the same way Antonio Pisani, a doctor, showed a fair degree of familiarity with the arguments he expounded, which gave him the ability to proselytize among a large group of people. In around 1736 he spoke of certain authors indicated as 'deists' and said that he had obtained a materialistic vision of man from them. Man was a mere device, devoid of a soul and destined to exhaust his destiny on this earth.¹⁰³

These mediators were essentially filters who took on the task, more or less knowingly, of building a link between different cultural levels. These filters were clearly anything but neutral and the messages they put forward in the public sphere could be distorted or differ completely from the original. Once a philosophical discourse reached the street, everyone could potentially become an intermediary for someone else. It was once again in Piazza San Marco in 1652 that a small group of priests had a lively discussion, with each one offering his view of the philosophical position of their colleague Don Carlo Filiotti, a priest in the Paduan countryside in Campolongo, near Piove di Sacco. Based on the evolution of their conversation, Don Carlo was convinced that a rational soul was mortal 'and that when the body dies, the soul dies too, proving his comment with the argument that everything created in this world is followed by its accessory, and as the soul is an accessory of the body ... the soul dies too when the body dies'.¹⁰⁴

The 'philosophical and legal arguments' that Filiotti expressed in public, which were then repeated in different circles from those in which they had originally been uttered,¹⁰⁵ are evidence of a public arena with rich opportunities for heterodoxy to be transmitted and thrive. The special importance attributed to dietary rules in the distinction between believers and heretics unsurprisingly led to a heated exchange about these issues at times and in places set aside for food. Discussions in *osterie* were fairly common, such as that which took place in 1697 between Antonio, a gondola gilder, and Francesco Bernardoni, a carpenter. They had vowed to the Madonna to fast on Wednesdays, but on one Wednesday they ended up in the Osteria del Cappello, in Piazza San Marco, at lunchtime with some colleagues. Bernardoni made it clear to the innkeeper that he did not want to eat, to the hilarity of Antonio, who started 'laughing and making fun of my piety, saying various things about it which I can't remember exactly ... but

¹⁰² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 135, Don Giovanni Dudoni file, trial against Don Pietro Buora, spontaneous appearance by Don Gasparo Pisani on 26 August 1710.

¹⁰³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 142, trial against Antonio Pisani, deposition by Abbot Antonio Gavisini on 14 March 1737.

¹⁰⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 107, trial against Don Carlo Filiotti, spontaneous appearance by Don Giovanni Piergiorganni on 24 August 1652, c. 1r.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., deposition by Don Bartolomeo Franzino on 19 December 1652, c. 16v.

basically concluded that one must not be devoted to saints or worship them because they were men like us'. Despite the protests 'he held fast to his initial propositions, and even gave reasons to defend them ... among other things I remember that he said that we were pagans, while we worshipped the statues of saints, and that we mustn't worship any other than the only God'.¹⁰⁶

Craftsmen's *botteghe* were also a well-frequented centre of sociability. The conversations held there covered a wide range of interests, prominent among which was the critique of orthodoxy. Heterodox propositions thus found a way to spread rapidly around certain professional circles. For example, in the 1690s the stonecutters of San Basilio repeatedly heard their colleague Domenico Cavalieri say that hell did not exist,¹⁰⁷ while some years before in 1655, the *tiraoro* (a kind of goldbeater) of San Salvador reminded each other that 'there is no fire in hell, but other torments'. As an alternative they claimed that hell did not exist at all and that assertions to the contrary by priests were due to the fact that they were trying to terrorize people and keep them under control. One advocate of the theory was Carlo Vanali, a colleague of theirs who repeated 'that God as a great Lord does not pay attention to or care about these little unimportant things'.¹⁰⁸ This epidemic diffusion therefore affected individuals who spent time together as a result of their work and had conversations together. Equally, *botteghe* where production and sales went hand in hand often became basic units where controversies could be developed. Although these were initially limited to a couple of people, they ended up involving larger groups in the initial role of listeners and then as polemicists. In this process it was not rare for complex teachings and doctrines to be used in the disputes, removed from their written form and transposed into oral format.

Let us take the case of the *bottega di scoti* run by Francesco Zancarello and Giovanni Maria Ton. In 1719 it was frequented by Don Francesco Rusca, head priest at the church of San Gimignano, the setting for a long-distance dispute with another priest, Don Giuseppe Giuliani, the head priest at San Giovanni Crisostomo.¹⁰⁹ The matter had been raised by Rusca with regard to the intercession of the saints. His attitude was extremely Christocentric as he denied

¹⁰⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 129, Doctor Neri file, trial against Antonio *indorador*, spontaneous appearance by Francesco Bernardoni on 28 February 1697.

¹⁰⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 127, Domenico Cavalieri file, trial against Domenico Cavalieri, deposition by Giovanni Dota on 26 November 1693.

¹⁰⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 108, Carlo Vanali file, trial against Carlo Vanali, spontaneous appearance before the Inquisitor by Giovan Francesco Vantaggi on 19 March 1655.

¹⁰⁹ According to the definition in Boerio's dictionary, *scoto* is a 'twill weave fabric', so called because it originated in Scotland: Giuseppe Boerio, *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano* (Venice: Premiata tipografia di Giovanni Cecchini editore, 1856).

any possibility of intervention by saints, devout images or the Madonna. He saw any devotion bestowed on them as pure idolatry, denying Christ the veneration he was due. He expressed these beliefs in the *bottega* in the presence of a number of people. The following day Francesco Zancarello and Giovanni Maria Ton referred everything to Don Giuliani when he came into the workshop. He first inquired about 'which effect had put the above-mentioned discourse into their heads' and then came back the following evening armed with *Concilio*, *Catechismo* and 'the Doctrine of Bellarmine'.¹¹⁰ He showed the passages about the veneration of saints, translating them 'into common language' and explaining them. One of those present, the *bottega* owner Zancarello, promised that he would use these arguments against Rusca. He did so the following week, drawing the priest into a discussion of faith and making him deny the effectiveness of indulgences: 'if you knew – said Rusca – it was because of indulgences that that bugger Luther did what he did, but in some respects he was right'. At this point Zancarello took out his recent doctrine and quoted from the books the priest was showing him to confuse him. The reply, limited to the Doctrine of Bellarmine, showed little regard for Zancarello's sources of knowledge and in the priest's opinion 'it needed to be burnt'.¹¹¹

It went on without interruption: during the day the craftsman's *botteghe*, bookshops and *spezierie* (spice shops) were full of people and conversations, while at night it was possible to move to private houses or special public places.¹¹² Some *botteghe d'acque* (spirit shops) stayed open all night despite the bans: it seems that above all those at Ponte dell'Angelo in San Marco, Santa Maria Formosa, Canonica, San Moisè, Ponte Grande di San Polo and Anconetta in Rio della Sensa provided shelter for the most incisive free discourse in all fields.¹¹³ This is not to say, however, that the others were normally places of Christian piety. In 1692 in the *bottega* owned by Giacomo Gelmini in San Basegio, Pietro Ormesini, an officer, tried to convince those present somewhat insistently 'that there is no hell or limbo, and that we only experience hell by living in this world'.

¹¹⁰ Roberto Bellarmino, *Dottrina christiana dell'illustrissimo, et reverendissimo card. Roberto Bellarmino* (Augusta: Christophoro Mango, 1614).

¹¹¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 138, trial against Don Francesco Rusca, spontaneous appearance by Don Giuseppe Giuliani on 22 August 1719 and depositions by Francesco Zancarelli on 31 August 1719 and by Giovanni Maria Ton on 28 November 1719.

¹¹² See Filippo De Vivo, 'Pharmacies as Centres of Communication in Early Modern Venice', *Renaissance Studies*, 21 (2007): 505–21; Marina Garbellotti and John Henderson, 'Teoria e pratica medica. Rimedi e farmacopee in età moderna', *Medicina & Storia*, 15 (2008); Andrea Caracausi, *Dentro la bottega. Culture del lavoro in una città d'età moderna* (Venice: Marsilio, 2008).

¹¹³ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 28 May 1683.

The real hell was ‘in houses, where there are children and there is nothing to eat’. If friars sustained the contrary, as the *bottega* owner asserted, fresh from a sermon and trying to reply ‘as well as he knew how to’, they only did it ‘to keep them afraid, so that they carried out good deeds’. However, the *bottega* comment was only repetition, as he had debated the same issue many times, both outdoors ‘at the bridge of San Basegio, on the occasion of gatherings of people’ and inside ‘*magazeni*’,¹¹⁴ to the point that it had become a running discussion between the workers in the craftsman’s *botteghe* while they worked, especially among ‘stonecutters’.¹¹⁵

One of these, Domenico Cavalieri, took Ormesini’s words particularly seriously, and the two became a fairly inseparable couple: ‘this Ormesini, Domenico’s companion, is another of those who talk about these matters of faith in *magazeni*’, as another stonecutter from the area defined them.¹¹⁶ Domenico used to adopt iconographic representations, probably of Dantean origin, to prove that hell did not exist, because he lacked the words to do so or he felt that he could express his ideas better that way. With a large audience in different *botteghe* in the San Basegio area, sometimes on a table and sometimes on stone ‘he made some marks with charcoal ... whose marks were depicted as an abyss, and then some other straight ones going up, and then he said that there were no depths portraying hell, as everyone was going up to heaven’.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ ‘In every one of the seventy-two parishes of the city of Venice, there is a large public-house called “magazzino”. It remains open all night, and wine is retailed there at a cheaper price than in all the other drinking houses. People can likewise eat in the “magazzino”, but they must obtain what they want from the pork butcher near by, who has the exclusive sale of eatables, and likewise keeps his shop open throughout the night. The pork butcher is usually a very poor cook, but as he is cheap, poor people are willingly satisfied with him, and these resorts are considered very useful to the lower class. The nobility, the merchants, even workmen in good circumstances, are never seen in the “magazzino”, for cleanliness is not exactly worshipped in such places. Yet there are a few private rooms which contain a table surrounded with benches, in which a respectable family or a few friends can enjoy themselves in a decent way’: Casanova, *History of My Life*, vol. 4, p. 187.

¹¹⁵ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 127, trial against Pietro Ormesini, spontaneous appearance by Giovanni Cerdon on 5 February and deposition by Giacomo Gelmini on 7 February 1692.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., deposition by Pasqualino de Grandi on 20 March 1692.

¹¹⁷ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 127, Domenico Cavalieri file, trial against Domenico Cavalieri, deposition by Giovanni Dota on 26 November 1693. Pietro Ormesini was imprisoned on 14 May 1693. He handed himself in after having escaped an attempted arrest the day before thanks to his son, who confronted the Captain of the Sant’Uffizio with a dagger. He was sentenced to a year in prison on 28 July, but because of his age (he said that he was 63 and 74 on different occasions) or financial problems, the Sant’Uffizio issued an order to release him as early as 17 November: ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 127, trial against Pietro Ormesini, sessions on 14 May, 28 July and 17 November 1693. He was notified of the release

Spezierie were one of the most crowded types of *bottega*, giving the impression that they could count on a fairly loyal, albeit itinerant, clientele. Those who frequented them tended to move around so that they managed to take part in as many discussions as they could, collecting the maximum amount of news in circulation so that they could then pass it on elsewhere. Many *spezierie* were furnished with chairs, making it possible to meet ‘as if in a private council so that everyone can refer what he has learnt and seen that day’. These ‘ship-shape groups’, made up of nobles, clergy, merchants and common people, where ‘they talk about everything’ seem to have been the norm and a feature of the urban landscape, at least from the mid-seventeenth century onwards.¹¹⁸

In the Croce di Malta *spezieria* in 1685, Zorzi Palmetta, a nobleman, discussed with the other habitués the fact that ‘the sexual acts of a free man with a free woman did not constitute a sin’, given that ‘our Lord God has pity on him’.¹¹⁹ In the Dell’Angelo *spezieria* in Padua in 1711, the same Inquisitor spoke as a simple customer, talking to individuals who were not always convinced of the material nature of hellfire.¹²⁰ The *spezieria* in Santa Marina was the location for ‘the usual gathering of partizans’ who talked about all subjects, clearly ‘without any regard, in accordance with what they think’.¹²¹ Instead, in the San Stin *spezieria* in 1684 a certain Don Castoro commented on the bombing of Genoa by the French and expounded his war theories:

on 19 November. Warned by several people, Domenico Cavalieri understood what was being prepared against him. It seems that many had knowledge of how much the Sant’Uffizio was mobilized, including a stonecutter, an oil seller and two fishermen. He therefore appeared spontaneously at the court on 17 December 1693, protesting that the words of his ‘enemies’ were not to be believed. This line of defence was not totally useful, given that none of the ‘enemies’ he named appeared among his accusers. However, he defended himself strenuously and claimed that he had never denied the existence of hell, but had only said that the biggest punishment was to be deprived of the sight of God. The trial against him was interrupted on the same day: ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 127, Domenico Cavalieri file, trial against Domenico Cavalieri, deposition and declaration on 17 December 1693.

¹¹⁸ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 28 May 1683. For an example of an evening pastime and non-heterodox conversation dealing with current events between noblemen and priests in a spice shop in San Marcilian, see *ibid.*, report on 30 August 1683. Andrea Cigna’s barbershop, a common meeting place for the pro-French, was nearby across the bridge next to the church: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 13 December 1685.

¹¹⁹ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 124, trial against Giuseppe Parisio, Giovan Battista Rompiasio and Isidoro Lescioni, spontaneous appearance by Giovanni Lorando on 6 September 1685.

¹²⁰ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 135, Don Giovanni Duroni file, trial against Filippo Serpicelli, spontaneous appearance by Fra’ Aloisio Maria Benetelli on 11 March 1711.

¹²¹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 640, anonymous report on 29 March 1706.

telling aloud about the ruins caused by the French in Genoa, he said that the Genoans had been hit by 16 bombs, which the French had brought there with a mortar to launch them and be more certain of destroying a certain place, they found two written notes inside the bombs, one of which said: *Dio birillo!* go to Genoa and burn as you usually do – The priest read it along with the other note ... saying that they work with witchcraft and that it is true that these bombs are made with diabolical art, he said that as some made the sign of the cross on the bombs flying through the air, they broke into pieces and caused no more damage.¹²²

This was a real boon for the *bottega* owner, who soon saw his clientele multiply. Many of those passing by were indeed led by their curiosity to enter the increasingly crowded *bottega*.

The Vigilanza spezieria under the Procuratie Vecchie was a meeting place for ‘many French and Italian novelists’, as well as regular customers of different social extraction and staff from embassies.¹²³ Here ‘sizeable different groups of people stopped in continuation to talk ... a lot is said, and I have heard many say that those secret meetings are scandalous, and now and again there might be an uproar’.¹²⁴ It seems that the Vigilanza was a fairly lively place for discussion and that it held this vocation for decades. In the late 1720s it was frequented among others by a certain Abbot Cerutti, who seems to have declared with a certain insistence that St Peter, ‘although he was an apostle, was a fool, and was reprimanded by Saint Paul, who wrote about his mistake to the Galatians, adding that St. Pope John I and Pope Liberius had supported the Aryan formula’.¹²⁵ In addition, he made philosophical claims that the fire in hell was not natural but of another kind. He ended up claiming that hell did not really exist, ‘because he can’t find where ... it might be’. In this way he earned himself a certain reputation as one ‘who put forth the above-mentioned discourses even if nobody else had given him the chance to do so’. There was, however, no lack of opportunities. The regular customers were friars, abbots, foreigners, craftsmen and painters, all with their own ideas to express. Therefore, while Count Superchi claimed in partial agreement with Cerutti that hell cannot have been so bad after all, Felice

Petricini, a painter, countered with CaJean-Pierre Cavaillé retics ‘with singular

¹²² ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 5 June 1684.

¹²³ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 615, report by Marco Marchetti on 11 August 1696.

¹²⁴ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 6 August 1684.

¹²⁵ The biblical reference is to Galatians 2:11–16, in which Paul reproaches Peter for hypocritical behaviour regarding the observance of Jewish practices. As far as the two popes are concerned, both Liberius I (352–366) and John I (523–526) were accused of openness or holding not completely hostile attitudes towards Arianism.

energy', but with a certain degree of self-control – 'oh God, I can't speak about it, besides the heretics are so right that you can't answer back' – to prove that God could not punish the sin with eternal damnation. Pietro Uberti, another painter, was able to conclude that 'if this thing were true, I'd be delighted about it'. In the same *bottega* another nobleman, Count Oldani, who might have been from Milan, contributed to the discussion of the usual group by claiming that there was no certainty that the Holy Scripture had been dictated by God, that it was more likely to have been a human product and that it was therefore reasonable to harbour doubts regarding its content. He must have done a certain amount of reading if he claimed that 'the biggest sect in the world is the one of pyrrhonists', of which many popes had also formed part.¹²⁶

However, at the Vigilanza and Santa Marina it was also an everyday occurrence to observe 'sonnets constantly being composed, the composition of pictures, scandalous things', in particular of a political nature. There were many clashes here between those who felt they were 'political subjects', pro-French or pro-Habsburg, intersecting and overlapping theological and religious discussions with political discussions.¹²⁷

The coffee house was the assigned place for conversation, 'the architecture for the emergence of the public sphere',¹²⁸ a place that 'from the end of the XVII century gradually became an important place for the slow interrelated spread of new knowledge and new tastes, new products and new forms of urban sociability'.¹²⁹ At the same time it turned out to be one of the main dangers to orthodoxy in the whole of Europe; in 1729 a Parisian police inspector noted the urgent need to restore order as the number of conversations in coffee houses by those speaking against religion was increasing, in parallel with the number of atheists or deists, so much so that, he concluded with dread, many would end up forming an autonomous religion, as had happened in England.¹³⁰ While Venetian coffee houses were only a relative presence during the second half of the seventeenth century, from the next century onwards they became a habitual

¹²⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 140, trial against Abbot Cerutti, spontaneous appearance by Felice Petricini on 6 July 1730.

¹²⁷ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 640, anonymous report on 30 June 1706.

¹²⁸ Steve Pincus, 'Coffee Politicians Does Create'. 'Coffeehouses and Restoration Political Culture', *Journal of Modern History*, 67 (1995): 807–34, at p. 822.

¹²⁹ Filippo M. Paladini, 'Sociabilità ed economia del loisir. Fonti sui caffè veneziani del XVIII secolo', *Storia di Venezia-Rivista*, 1 (2003): 153–281, which is also useful for its extensive up-to-date bibliography (pp. 153–5) on a socio-economic area of extraordinary importance in modern Europe.

¹³⁰ The episode is quoted in Alan C. Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650–1729. Volume 1: The Orthodox Sources of Disbelief*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 12.

element in the documents of the city's Holy Office, both as protagonists and background settings. Discussions held there rarely stayed within the boundaries of orthodoxy and tended to veer off, touching on other matters and demolishing the most sensational issues. This situation was linked both to the organization of internal space and the reputation of coffee houses, which attracted a certain type of clientele. For example, in around 1715 Antonio's coffee house in Campo della Guerra in San Giuliano apparently became a meeting place for Venetian and foreign noblemen, who took advantage of the presence of 'little rooms that invite you to stop and stimulate conversation'.¹³¹ In such places it was easy to move on from gallant explanations of current affairs, literature and worldly matters to the religious question. This was part of the little thrill that lent conversation its appeal. Pietro Damia, 'a man of studies and knowledge, a great talker, and highly talented at speaking and writing satire', found refuge in Venetian coffee houses after having been reported to the Holy Office in Bologna.

In 1762, during a period of evolved sociability, we come across the following coffee house scene:

On one of the last few days I entered on seeing him sitting in the Café Capella under the Procuratie Vecchie and on hearing that he was speaking, and had the attention of the floor as they say – the speech was about comedy, tragedy and theatre – after having digressed on the Italian, Latin and Greek traditions, he said that theatrical performances had an ancient origin, and he thought that they even existed at the time of the Jews, identifying that the parable and story of Job was written down to be performed, just as the love stories were that can be read in the Song of Songs, specifying a passage from it and repeating: *manum suam introduxit per foramen, et contremuit totum venter meum*, adding that it couldn't be more straightforward and literal to understand that it was talking about pleasure and fun. At the same moment, on seeing Orsi Veronese go by, a man who he often walked in the square with, he left the café and joined him.¹³²

This was not a new scene and was by no means a product of the times or the Age of Enlightenment. The ability to speak about different matters, perhaps connecting them boldly and building original parallels which caught the imagination, were the qualities of the 'virtuoso' who wanted to have 'the floor' and found coffee houses to be the perfect environment for making himself known and expressing his personal thoughts. The rapid spread of such meeting places around the city added new locations for gathering and discussing to those

¹³¹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 640, anonymous report on 30 September 1715.

¹³² ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 595, report by Felice Favretti undated but traced to 1762.

that already existed, such as *botteghe di acque*, *spezierie*, craftsmen's *botteghe* and *magazeni*.¹³³ There were also *botteghini*, where smoking was allowed and which catered for a lower class of clientele, 'common people and vagabonds'. They were open all night and cliques were formed in them, holding meetings where the participants gave free rein to their thoughts and words 'fired up by mind-altering smoke'.¹³⁴ Furthermore, in the eighteenth century coffee was also available in certain *botteghe delle 'acque'*. It seems that Dei Veludi under the Procuratie Nuove was particularly popular, frequented by the secretary from the French Embassy, noblemen, 'Jews, Greek priests and all kinds of people', who also took advantage of the opportunity to play cards.¹³⁵

Barbershops were another major centre for discussing and analysing dissent, places where people could stop off, read gazettes, enjoy conversation and gamble. In one of the many examples in the 1670s, Andrea Cigna's barbershop at Ponte dei Mori became a regular meeting place for almost all the staff from the French Embassy.¹³⁶ Alla Canonica, on the other hand, was a 'meeting-place for senators'.¹³⁷ Thanks to the networks created in this way, barbers were especially valued as intermediaries. They were often contacted to find out how to procure unorthodox material and which people had it or could help get hold of it. In one such example dating from 1698, a musician called 'the Roman, who lives in

¹³³ According to some, the first coffee house in Europe opened in Venice in 1647: Etienne François, 'Il caffè', in Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (ed.), *Luoghi quotidiani nella storia d'Europa* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1993), pp. 148–59, at p. 148. Traditionally, Venetian historiography establishes the date for the opening of the first Venetian *bottega*, under the Procuratie Vecchie, as 1683. See Paladini, 'Sociabilità ed economia del loisir', pp. 154–5.

¹³⁴ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 28 May 1683.

¹³⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 597, report by Lorenzo Franco on 9 November 1739. The places where one could play were indeed often indistinguishable from the *botteghe*. An official or unofficial meeting place could be created in *botteghe di acquavite*, *spezierie*, barbershops or chemists. The whole city 'appears to be covered with a dense changing network of gaming houses, more precarious than clandestine, that disappear and reappear continually depending on opportunities': Derosas, 'Moralità e giustizia', pp. 448–9. This environment was suited to the spread of somewhat free ideas and attitudes, not to mention the fact that some found gambling to be a good way to test whether God existed. One also therefore stood to lose one's faith, considering the constant appeals to expedients of a supernatural nature. There was a huge range of them. There were experts who specialized in making charms, consecrated hosts and blessed cards to bring good luck. If they did not work, it was possible to try the alternative of invoking the devil. If the latter also failed, as it did, the conclusion was that no world existed after death: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 705, news from Venice on 25 July 1693.

¹³⁶ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 597, reports by Giovanni Fossali on 11 December 1672 and 15 May 1673.

¹³⁷ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 8 December 1686.

Calle di San Domenico in Castello and goes around playing the guitar' went to Ambrogio Grotta's barbershop, asking to be put in contact with someone who could conjure up the devil and make him appear in human form in order to find some treasure.¹³⁸ However, any attempt to make a classification clashes with the constant intertwining of words and discourses, and the perpetual movement of people who crossed paths and informed each other, thereby conveying messages that ended up involving an increasingly wide audience.

For example, the very popular barbershop owned by Onorato d'Arbes in San Salvador and the hat shop owned by his two sons Giovan Battista and Antonio in San Lio must have been central to a vibrant network of relationships. Onorato collected information for the French ambassador and maintained a close relationship with the Embassy. He offered refuge to Frenchmen in difficulty and welcomed bandits close to the Duke of Mantua.¹³⁹ As a result, his shop was often transformed into a *ridotto* (gaming house) frequented by spies, gazetteers and adventurers of all kinds, including vociferous convinced atheists like Giuseppe Rossi and Tobia Haselberg,¹⁴⁰ equally vociferous blasphemers such as Count Mario Tolomeo Nerucci,¹⁴¹ and the Rosicrucian alchemist Federico Gualdi, along with other members of his sect.¹⁴² He was also on good

¹³⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 129, Egidio Tonoli file, trial against Pier Francesco Parravicino, deposition by Ambrogio Grotta on 16 September 1698.

¹³⁹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 28 May 1684.

¹⁴⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 126, trial against Tobia Haselberg, spontaneous appearance by Domenico Paterno on 22 May 1692. Giuseppe and Tobia were two representative figures of a restless changing world. Giuseppe Rossi, 70 and from Catania, went by the name of Filippo Aragonese in Venice. He had been a priest, but received permission to lay aside the cassock when he was about 20. After that, for 30 years he 'wore a sword', until he returned to the church when he turned 50. He lived variously in Naples, Rome, Holland and Germany, mostly in Hamburg. He also had long stays in Vienna and Prague. It was here that he came into contact with the local Jesuits, who entrusted him with one of their pupils, Tobia Francesco Haselberg, who later became known in Venice as Francesco Wallenstein, a 16 year old 'of good birth' who had been born not far from Vienna. Tobia wanted to move to Italy 'in order to travel the world' and learn the language. The Jesuits felt that Giuseppe Rossi was a 'virtuous' enough subject to accompany him. They had arrived in Venice four years earlier, in around 1688, and in 1690 Rossi was employed by the Provveditori alla Sanità (the health authority), as his numerous talents included being a doctor, and was posted to Dalmatia, where the plague was raging. After returning from Dalmatia, he continued working as a doctor: *ibid.*, declarations by Tobia Haselberg and Giuseppe Rossi on 24 July 1692, cc. 5r–7r.

¹⁴¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 124, trial against Mario Tolomeo Nerucci, spontaneous appearance by Giovan Battista Confalonieri on 5 July 1685.

¹⁴² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 119, trial against Federico Gualdi, spontaneous appearance by Francesco Giusto on 21 April 1676, c. 1v. When he arrived in Venice, probably in the 1640s, Gualdi was undoubtedly one of the most enigmatic figures that chose to live and

work in Venice. He was one of the main authors of the European Rosicrucian resurgence in the 1660s and set up a sect in the city – the Cavalieri dell’aurea e rosa croce – which was extremely influential and complex. Set up in close contact with diplomatic and political information circles, the group stood out for its ability to create a dense network of relations, even of a financial nature, that connected travellers, foreigners, ambassadors, merchants and the high patriciate in Venice. It was in this way that it managed to escape surveillance by the Inquisition. Furthermore, by exploiting this network its members could enter the city and distribute a set of books and knowledge that the official channels could not provide. Indeed, the members – doctors, jurists, noblemen, diplomats, painters and craftsmen – managed to procure banned material fairly easily from all over the world, first of all by exploiting the epistolary networks. Indeed, many of them – Pietro Andrea Andreini, Nicolò Bon, Marquis Francesco Maria Santinelli, Francesco Travagino and so on – were involved in leading exchange networks for scientific information. As there were members of different academies from all over Europe, starting with the Royal Society, the sect acted as a meeting place for different non-homogenous experiences – alchemy and the search for the *lapis philosophorum* are mixed up with Boyle’s hydraulic experiments, demonic invocations with discussions of a deist nature and mysticism with libertinism – which were nevertheless important for managing to link Venetian culture to its more advanced continental counterpart. On the Federico Gualdi affair and the characteristics of its Venetian networks of relationships, see Federico Barbierato, ‘Giovanni Giacomo Hertz. Editoria e commercio librario a Venezia nel secondo Seicento – II’, *La Bibliofilia*, 3 (2005): 275–89; Federico Barbierato and Adelisa Malena, ‘Rosacroce, libertini e alchimisti nella società veneta del secondo Seicento: i Cavalieri dell’Aurea e Rosa Croce’, in Gian Mario Cazzaniga (ed.), *Storia d’Italia*, Annali, 25, *Esoterismo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2010), pp. 323–57; Eric Humbertclaude, *Federico Gualdi a Venise: fragments retrouvés (1660–1678)* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2010); Alexandre de Danann, *Un Rose-Croix méconnu entre le XVIIe et le XVIIIe siècles: Federico Gualdi ou Auguste Melech Hultazob prince d’Achem* (Milan: Archè, 2006). For a more general European overview, see the papers by Laura Balbiani and Carlos Gilly in Carlos Gilly and Cis van Heertum (eds), *Magia, alchimia, scienza dal ’400 al ’700. L’influsso di Ermete Trismegisto* [*Magic, Alchemy, Science from 1500–1800. The Influence of Hermes Trismegistus*] (2 vols, Florence: Centro Di, 2002), vol. 2, pp. 207–34. The question of the link between alchemy and libertinism – on which see Didier Khan, ‘Une recette alchimique au XVII^e siècle pour convertir le pain en chair et en sang’, in Alain Mothu (ed.), *Révolution scientifique et libertinage*, (Brussels: Brepols, 2002), pp. 177–92 – has recently been tackled in the scope of the bigger problem of the relationship between libertinism and science, which traditional historiography has presented as hostile and irreconcilable, but which instead reveal points of contact and continuity. See the introduction by Alain Mothu in *Révolution scientifique et libertinage* and especially ‘Mathématiques et libertinisme’, at pp. 209–50; Carlo Borghero, ‘Da una continuità all’altra: immagini del Seicento e del Settecento nella storiografia filosofica italiana del dopoguerra’, in Enrico Donaggio and Enrico Pasini (eds), *Cinquant’anni di storiografia filosofica in Italia. Omaggio a C.A. Viano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000), pp. 187–207. See the case of Antonio Partenio’s house, one of the many in Venice that seem to endorse the theory of a complex interweaving of libertine and scientific elements, especially those inspired by Copernicus and Galileo. When he reported to the Sant’Uffizio in 1705, he confessed that he had also supported ‘with some firmness of opinion’ the movement of the earth, together

terms with Girolamo Brusoni, who asked for the necessary help from Turin in July 1677 after having been imprisoned as a cheat by the Esecutori contro la bestemmia. On the same occasion the French ambassador also took steps to secure his release.¹⁴³

His two sons had grown up in this seemingly open-minded environment, while his daughter had moved to Mantua in the service of the Duke of Mantua thanks to favourable family relations.¹⁴⁴ His older son, Giovan Battista, was convinced that everybody could be saved by his religion and made no secret of it. This was not especially unusual, like the justification it offered, and the subject was a popular one in its different variations. For example, if the Jews and Turks had really been enemies of God, He would not have given them souls knowing that they were destined to lose them. To sum up, everybody was saved in the end, even the damned, – and here he offered a refined observation – ‘it is always said: God’s infinite mercy, and not infinite justice’.

Furthermore, it was not difficult for the two to procure banned books such as those by Ferrante Pallavicino. A rumour circulated that they had *Il corriero svaligiato* and *Le vigilie* in their possession at the very least.¹⁴⁵ However, they almost certainly also had other channels available, considering their links with the bookseller Ponzio Bernardone, another Frenchman, whose shop, ‘All’insegna del Tempo’, was nearby in San Salvador. It became a meeting place for different kinds of people, some interested in the latest books and others in banned books, news from around the world or state secrets. These interests clearly often coincided. For example, in 1686 the agent of the Duke of Mantua, a staunch ally of France, made it almost a branch of the residence, meeting confidants and pro-French gazetteers there.¹⁴⁶ The sources do not clarify whether discussions in the bookshop extended beyond political and diplomatic matters to the less orthodox ones that he appears to have been famous for because ‘he preaches to all his servants against the faith of Jesus Christ, and rejects devotion to saints in heaven, divine providence, purgatory and hell, claiming the mortality of the soul when the body dies.’¹⁴⁷ These were clearly more or less the same ideas preached at the same time by Don Francesco Colli, another acquaintance and

with the traditional libertine issues: ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 132, trial of 5 March, deposition by Antonio Partenio on 8 April 1705, cc. 8r bis.

¹⁴³ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, report by Onorato Castelnovo on 19 July 1677.

¹⁴⁴ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 663, report by ‘Grand Captain’ Nicolò da Ponte on 28 February 1686.

¹⁴⁵ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 151, *Miscellanea processi* (miscellaneous trials) file, spontaneous appearance by Giovan Battista Alfieri on 1 March 1695.

¹⁴⁶ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 27 March 1686.

¹⁴⁷ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 26 June 1683.

frequenter of the *bottega*.¹⁴⁸ A few years before in 1681 even Abbot Muselani, who as far as heterodoxy was concerned was certainly no less an enthusiast than the agent or Colli, had been a regular visitor to the bookshop and used it to put forward his doctrines to those who happened to be there.¹⁴⁹ There were 'secret meetings ... on a daily basis, with people from his country and other foreigners', as one observer reported.¹⁵⁰

Over the years Bernardone's bookshop assumed all the characteristics of an active sorting centre for political news and heterodox knowledge. Anyone looking for something, whether information or books, could be fairly sure of finding it there. For example, Bernardone's catalogue promised 'political manuscripts with secrets and venom, and writings on the subject of princes and courts', partly hidden under the counter or in a secret room in the attic of his house next to the church for more substantial material.¹⁵¹ He was also able to take advantage of a dense network of relations to procure material that was not immediately available. For example, he served a certain Don Francesco Loredan, a priest who worked as a tutor in the house of a nobleman from the Vendramin family; known as an 'awful priest and bad Christian', he owed part of his fame to the fact that 'he kept forbidden books, and ... copied them'. Judging by Loredan's area of specialization, they must have been books mostly about magic.¹⁵²

On the other hand, Bernardone does not seem to have been too worried about the potential interest shown by the Inquisition. It was known that he had fled Rome pursued by the Sant'Uffizio after having spent some time in prison in Civitavecchia for having sold anti-clerical books.¹⁵³ It was no coincidence that

¹⁴⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, trial against Don Francesco Colli, spontaneous appearance by Giovan Francesco Vezzosi on 13 January 1688. It should be noted that Vezzosi, a salaried gazetteer from Modena, was also a regular visitor to the bookshop.

¹⁴⁹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 123, trial against Francesco Muselani, spontaneous appearance by Don Giuseppe Mauccio on 11 August 1682.

¹⁵⁰ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 639, anonymous report on 27 September 1686 found in the box for accusations at the Heads of the Council of Ten and sent on to the Inquisitors of State.

¹⁵¹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 3 March 1685.

¹⁵² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 124, trial against Don Francesco Loredan, Giovan Battista Scoccati, Lelio Bontempi, deposition by Cristoforo de Toffolo on 4 September 1687. Loredan was also well known to other booksellers, who sent customers that asked for certain books to him: *ibid.*, spontaneous appearance by Lelio Bontempi on 1 August 1686. In the Frenchman's finest tradition, relations with Bernardone ended by 'throwing punches at each other'.

¹⁵³ Francesco Barberi, 'Per una storia del libro romano', in *Studi in onore di Leopoldo Sandri* (3 vols, Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 55–73.

he chose to move to a city which gave him greater scope for movement from this point of view. It seems that the Venetian Inquisitor received an order to search the *bottega* from the Congregation, but that 'he couldn't perform his duty after being asked not to do so by a person in authority'.¹⁵⁴ It is difficult to say exactly which authority this was, but it is probable that the Inquisitor meant the French ambassador or someone closely linked to his circle.

All things considered, Bernardone was more entitled to feel worried about the more urgent threat of an unwelcome visit to the *bottega* by the courts. With the profession he practised and the people he frequented, it was not so rare for regulars at the bookshop to unsheathe their swords, perhaps to the detriment of the owner. In these cases, although the ambassador's protection was influential, it risked being so posthumously, saving the honour of a person's memory rather than his life.¹⁵⁵ This was especially true because the bookseller had chosen his calling in French partisanship at precisely the time when it was less healthy to do so. Because of the war in the 1680s, which saw the French make little effort to hide their support for the Turks, Frenchmen in Venice were considered more or less in the same light as their allies. There were several popular risings against the Embassy, which were met with an oppressive response. On 11 September 1686 'a riot of people' broke out 'in Bernardone the Frenchman's *bottega*'. A customer had accused him of having given counterfeit money as change. Bernardone saw red and in protesting his innocence used a dangerous argument, 'saying that he was French and Gambirasi [the unsatisfied customer] was Italian, and this was enough as his faith was better than the other's'. It then becomes a scene reminiscent of *Commedia dell'Arte*:

When Gambirasi heard that, he raised his voice and said: 'you say the French faith is better than our Italian one, but you are a liar', and at the same time he hit their faces, the above-mentioned Frenchman and a soldier who was with Bernardone. When this happened, many people crowded around, and Bernardone menaced Gambirasi by saying that he would report the incident to the French ambassador, and that it would be taken as an insult to the French faith. When they heard the word France, all the neighbouring shopkeepers fell into silence, and the bookseller replied that even the Inquisitori di Stato would be involved in the case. Gambirasi

The item about Bernardone is on p. 61.

¹⁵⁴ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 639, anonymous report on 27 September 1686.

¹⁵⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 15 December 1685. A few days previously, two lackeys of the Duke of Parma had 'unsheathed their swords to kill the bookseller who ... remains protected by the above-mentioned Embassy'. This was followed by indignation on the part of the French ambassador and the relative diplomatic arrangements.

responded: 'if you say that the French faith is good and ours is not, you are a scoundrel', and many other insults; everyone silently applauded.¹⁵⁶

The silence of neighbouring *bottega* owners and their subdued applause imply that Bernardone's social role was well known. However, this was not an isolated case. It was known that bookshops were dangerous meeting places, at least in terms of the conversations held there, if not always for potentially violent outcomes. It was possible to meet passionate readers who went there to obtain unorthodox works, hear people offering their 'gloss' on the texts or comment on world affairs and everyday current events. For example, in Alvise Piccin's bookshop 'all'insegna della Ragion' on 29 October 1697 there was a lively discussion about the theological implications of a case reported by a fisherman. Someone had been found drowned in a well with a sign around his neck saying 'charitas me salvum fecit' ('charity has saved me'). A certain Doctor Neri argued that 'those who serve the law of nature alone are saved', but an abbot from out of town reproached him and accused him of supporting a Pelagian proposition, while the large group present came out in support of either one or the other. On the following Tuesday (5 November), the same group met and the conversation turned to apparitions of ghosts of the deceased. Doctor Neri was once again the driving force of the debate; he felt that such apparitions should be considered imaginary and that the diseases caused by demons were imaginary too. He denied that the latter had any sensibility and in the end that they even existed. His evidence was taken from the Bible, interpreted in a surprisingly literal way 'by saying that Adam and Eve were not tempted by the devil but by a serpent, and so it is the serpent that slithers along the ground and not the devil'. They countered him in vain with 'the matter of Job', but he was adamant.¹⁵⁷

In the 1660s Fra' Ildefonso, a Benedictine friar from the monastery of San Giorgio, toured bookshops in search of news 'under the guise of finding books for the library' in the monastery. He spent his days doing the rounds of bookshops, having conversations and collecting information which he then sent to Rome, Ferrara, Genoa and Turin.¹⁵⁸ While in Francesco Nicolini's bookshop in Spadaria 'different people gather together all day and address every subject',¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., document dated 11 September 1686.

¹⁵⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 129, Doctor Neri file, trial against Doctor Neri, spontaneous appearance by Don Domenico Coledanio on 28 November 1697. The reply clearly refers to the biblical episode of Job, hit by misfortune at the hands of Satan.

¹⁵⁸ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 639, document found in the box for accusations on 9 July 1669.

¹⁵⁹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 10 June 1684. The bookseller and the groups that met in the *bottega* were openly pro-French. The bookshop

Hertz's bookshop was a meeting place for foreign travellers, heretics of the worst kind, who chose books against the Church.¹⁶⁰ More generally, for a long time bookshops were more centres for discussion than points of sale. Johann Caspar Goethe, in the city in 1740, was amazed by the crowds usually found in them and even more so by the fact that nobody or only a few bought books, while everybody read and had discussions. 'In these bookshops, under the pretext of buying a trifle one can meet the most important people in the city.'¹⁶¹ Half a century later his son Johann Wolfgang also did not hold back his amazement on encountering a bookshop in Padua: 'at any time of day you can find good company in the shop. Everyone who is in any way connected with literature – secular clergy, nobility, artists – drops in. You ask for a book, browse in it or take part in a conversation as the occasion arises'.¹⁶²

As we have seen, the heterodox and political discourses blended into each other regularly and easily. If this happened in bookshops and other places in the city which were not technically geared towards politics and diplomacy, embassies were certainly on the same level and often turned out to be meeting places with an active role in the exchange of ideas and opinions not always based on maximum adherence to orthodoxy. In the first place, thanks to mediation by diplomatic personnel it was very easy to procure banned materials, especially books, which ambassadors could have delivered from their country of origin fairly easily. Furthermore, the environment that surrounded diplomatic residencies, protected by 'lists' (the extraterritorial areas around the Embassy), conferred a degree of audacity increased by its immunity from punishment. In the end it was not really true that diplomatic appointments in Venice were seen as imprisonment, as was commonly thought,¹⁶³ or at least the ambassadors and their families did their best not to live under those circumstances. In the early eighteenth century, for example, 'academic amusements' were a daily occurrence

often hosted diplomatic meetings and negotiations that involved people connected to the French ambassador officially or otherwise. See ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, reports by Onorato Castelnovo on 7 December 1677 and 21 July 1678.

¹⁶⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 108, trial against Bartolomeo Moro, depositions by Giovan Battista Gherin on 27 June and Lorenzo Presan on 4 July 1656.

¹⁶¹ Johann C. Goethe, *Viaggio in Italia (1740)*, Arturo Farinelli (ed.) (2 vols, Rome: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1932), vol. 1, p. 40, but see also pp. 38–41.

¹⁶² Johann W. Goethe, *Selected Works* (New York: Everyman's Library, 2000), p. 439, Padua, 27 September. Both episodes are remembered by Mario Infelise, *L'editoria veneziana nel '700* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1991), pp. 50–51, who focuses on the characteristics and topography of *botteghe* from the 1730s onwards.

¹⁶³ 'L'ambassade de Venise est prise pour une rélégation par tous ceux qui y sont envoyés, rien n'étant plus chagrinant à une personne de qualité que de ne pouvoir pratiquer avec aucune autre de cette condition dans le pays où il reside': Freschot, quotation, p. 334.

in the French Embassy,¹⁶⁴ but already by the 1660s people were surprised by the freedom with which ‘all kinds of noblemen, young and old people’ associated with foreign princes or diplomatic agents.¹⁶⁵ In 1685 a group of about ten noblemen used to stop and talk for hours with the French ambassador’s wife, so much so that the custom was institutionalized and given the name ‘knot of people’. Etiquette expected her to show contempt towards the Venetian nobility – and to tell the truth she did not seem to find it too hard to do so – while the nobility had to show total admiration for France. All this was played out to the accompaniment of a discreet group of musicians who beat time to the conversation.¹⁶⁶

At a lower level, groups of bandits gravitated towards the embassies, counting on the diplomatic immunity that resulted from providing services to the ambassador or simply from having their refugee status recognized.¹⁶⁷ Understandably, the environment was generally characterized by a degree of liveliness and was also a satisfactory meeting place for those looking for heterodox reasoning or discourses in religious and confessional terms. There were many fugitives from the different inquisitorial courts, for example, especially from those in the papal state, such as the previously mentioned Malvasia counts or the two apostate friars who found refuge in the *Lista di Spagna* in 1709 and enjoyed friendly relations with the ambassadors to France and the Empire too.¹⁶⁸ Others who did not have solid diplomatic support could take refuge in the houses of Venetian noblemen, such as Moranti, a Carmelite who had been convicted by the Sant’Uffizio in Verona but had escaped from prison and was able to walk around the city undisturbed, talking ‘with scandalous liberty’¹⁶⁹ under the protection of a *Correr procurator di San Marco*.

There were therefore both places and times especially suited to discussion, and in the case of *botteghe* and embassies there was also ample opportunity to express and listen to discourses which were heretical, unbelieving or generally heterodox. However, a typological classification based on the one suggested above should be taken for what it is – namely a mere outline or an attempt to at

¹⁶⁴ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 640, anonymous report on 23 July 1705.

¹⁶⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 639, anonymous report on 16 March 1660.

¹⁶⁶ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 10 July 1685.

¹⁶⁷ There were dozens of them. Among the many lists, there is one regarding the French Embassy in ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 615, report by Marco Marchetti on 17 October 1696, where he names 20.

¹⁶⁸ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 635, reports by Rinaldo Tadini on 20 and 28 March 1709.

¹⁶⁹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 601, report by Bernardino Garbinati on 9 September 1708.

least identify the places where dissent was most common. A degree of flexibility is required, as, when meeting someone in any location, any pretext could be good to talk about matters of faith, often in terms not exactly favourable towards tradition and the hierarchy. In January 1693 the 22-year-old Giorgio Cottoni was in the Greek church in the company of nobleman Michele Priuli, a certain Doctor Caprisi and Michele Mezario, a barber. Suddenly, 'without any reason' according to the barber, he claimed that the soul was mortal. As for the Gospels, they had 'been written on tree bark, and ... are not to be believed'.¹⁷⁰ The holy place was clearly suited to theological considerations – or perhaps Casanova was right in saying that 'the devil, as everyone knows, sets more snares in church than anywhere else'¹⁷¹ – if in 1648 a certain Nicolò Pace confessed to the Holy Office in Udine that in the cathedral in the city he had often 'supported certain opinions against the duty and truth of the Holy Mother Church'.¹⁷² More generally, churches were lively meeting places during religious services. People hastened there to enjoy the music above all, but flirtation and discourses of any kind were certainly not frowned upon. The following description was portrayed as the norm:

... after lunch at the church of the Mendicanti I saw a large number of people, men and women, who were flirting. It was not, however, behaviour that merits attention. Near the main door there was hurly-burly and laughter. At the doors beside the high altar there were conversations and groups of people dressed as nobles, who were speaking about personal matters, just like in other places, in the pews of the church. Below the place where the maidens sing there was someone dressed as a nobleman who was making foolish gestures and a woman who drew attention to herself and made those who were near her laugh ... Otherwise I saw little piety, which couldn't have been any less, even among those who were just there to listen to the singing and music.¹⁷³

The reports by Domenico Pavani, appointed by the Republic between 1680 and 1681 to keep scandalous happenings under control, offer an interesting

¹⁷⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 127, Cavalieri Domenico file, trial against Giorgio Cottoni, spontaneous appearance by Michele Mezario on 17 February 1693.

¹⁷¹ Casanova, *History of My Life*, vol. 5, p. 50.

¹⁷² Enzo Kermol, *La rete di Vulcano. Inquisizione, libri proibiti e libertini nel Friuli del Seicento* (Trieste: Università degli studi di Trieste, 1990), trial 33, deposition by Nicolò Pace on 26 September 1648, pp. 82–3. However, as he sustained, he was only guided by 'political interest' towards the ecclesiastical government.

¹⁷³ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 652, report by informer at the *nunziatura* on 26 March 1683.

perspective of churches as meeting places, salons and even *ridotti*,¹⁷⁴ in total contrast with the *fedi* (certificates) that priests were required to issue on a monthly basis to certify that no scandals of any kind had happened in the relevant holy area.¹⁷⁵ In reality the church offered the opportunity to form ‘cocoons’, have ‘ongoing discussions’ and even flirt. Sarpi had already noted this and was even annoyed about the custom of celebrating ‘the divine services in an unknown language’, observing how:

People, when gathering at Mass, keep on trading as usual, as if the congregation was not meant to serve of God, but to meet up and attend to one’s own matters. So gentlemen discuss their business, merchants go about their deals, and idle youths would not find a better place to meet their lovers than in the church during Mass.

He concluded: ‘and others observe and laugh at the inept and meaningless gestures some devout people make’.¹⁷⁶

Home affairs

The houses of those who worked from home were halfway between the public and private sectors. In the houses of prostitutes and paramours, for example, meetings between habitués often led to the formulation, expression and comparison of opinions on matters of faith. In particular, given the nature of the location, favourite discussion topics tended to focus on sexual matters. In one of many examples, at the end of 1679 Zanetta Burchiereta’s house became a regular meeting place for Marco Visonio, a *sollecitatore di palazzo* (a kind of legal procurator), Carlo Plati, a violinist, and an unidentified German priest. During one of these meetings Marco asked the priest ‘what it was that had been forbidden to Adam in the beginning of the world’. After the priest answered ‘that it was the apple, Marco ... said it wasn’t true that God had forbidden the

¹⁷⁴ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 622, reports by Domenico Pavani. Already in 1628 the *pievano* (priest) of San Samuele used to stay in church after Mass to read the gazettes and discuss them with a sizeable ‘cocoon’ of people: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 594, report by Bernardo Drusi on 30 November 1628.

¹⁷⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 880, parish priest certificates 1670–1690.

¹⁷⁶ *Relazione dello stato della religione, e con quali disegni et arti ella è stata fabricata e maneggiata in diversi stati di queste occidentali parti del mondo*. This is the Italian translation of the work by Edwin Sandys, published in Geneva in 1635. Sarpi made additions to eight chapters. The text is in Paolo Sarpi, *Opere: Lettere a gallicani e protestanti; Dalla ‘Relazione dello stato della religione’*. *Trattato delle materie beneficarie*, Gaetano and Luisa Cozzi (eds) (Turin: Einaudi-Ricciardi, 1978), pp. 51–88, at p. 60.

apple, but that he had forbidden sins against nature, and that is why he sinned, and ... then they moved on to another matter'.¹⁷⁷

In addition to this form of sociability, which was notoriously widely practised, heterodox unrest that had been tapped into outside the home was often then cultivated within domestic groups. The documentation shows that discussions and exchanges on matters of faith within families must have been fairly usual. However, there was undoubtedly increased private or semi-public propagation within the family unit by people who shared the house even if they did not belong to the same family group. The high number of tenants found in Venice guaranteed a series of contacts and exchanges between people who lived under the same roof, perhaps for a fairly limited period. The relative rapidity of contacts ensured that a huge number of people crossed paths, thereby creating a rapidly contagious heterodox vehicle. One good example of this is the conversations held in 1722 in the inner portico of a house in Campo San Simeon Profeta, where the tenants could easily meet and talk 'about the law of Christians, Jews, Turks and Calvinists'. One of them, Nicolò Rompiasio, a soldier, used to teach the others that grace and the soul did not exist and that there were no differences between the above-mentioned faiths.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, in the 1730s Marta Mariani's tenants in Santa Maria Formosa – a doctor, an abbot, a *bottega* apprentice in the *Vigilanza spezieria*, a nobleman and a manservant – used to retire after meals in Marta's company 'to the conversation table', where they addressed a range of topics, focusing above all on sexual sin. They all agreed that it was not a sin at all.¹⁷⁹

Here is an example of a domestic conversation with heterodox implications. At the beginning of December 1679 Carlo Cima, a priest originally from Rome, went to Marietta Tubini's house in San Pantalon after lunch. He found the landlady there with some of her tenants, all from Romagna: Carlo Mancini, a painter, and Silvestro Tonini, Giuseppe Serpieri and Pietro Mariani, who were all priests. They started talking about sermons and missions, a simple 'mealtime' conversation as Mariani later defined it in an attempt to clear himself.¹⁸⁰ Then

¹⁷⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 121, trial against Marco Visonio, known as Bollani, spontaneous appearance by Michele Paganin on 9 January 1680. Marco combined his visits with theory: in the search carried out on 20 January 1680 he was found to be in possession of a copy of *Rettorica delle puttane* by Ferrante Pallavicino: *ibid.*, session on 30 January 1680.

¹⁷⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 139, trial against Nicolò Rompiasio, spontaneous appearance by Matteo Scaglioni on 9 July 1722, cc. 2r–v.

¹⁷⁹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 142, trial against Antonio Pisani, spontaneous appearance by Angelo Mazzon on 21 August 1736.

¹⁸⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 122, trial against Don Pietro Mariani, spontaneous appearance by Mariani on 19 December 1679.

Cima demonstrated a level of zeal that was perhaps excessive by saying that ‘it was a good thing to suffer and be martyred for faith and glory’, at which Mariani answered ‘that it seemed like madness to him to suffer for such uncertain things as faith and glory’.¹⁸¹ The outcome was a discussion in which everybody took part, but the real dispute took place between Cima and Mariani, spanning a good four hours.¹⁸²

Relishing the freedom of the situation – a post-prandial conversation between fellow countrymen – and the amount of alcohol that he was no longer used to (he was not teetotal but had not drunk for some time for reasons of poverty, and there were two types of Moscato and ordinary wine on the table),¹⁸³ Mariani freely expressed ideas that he had ‘always thought about’.¹⁸⁴ He was convinced that ‘there is no difference between faith and opinion, and you can and must doubt whatever you want for reasons of intellect’. After all, Christians, Turks, heretics and Jews all had different opinions, but each one was legitimate because it had been given by God. In this way, he argued, ‘everyone can be saved in his law’, and so the only thing to do was to ‘pray to God for inspiration to know which law is the best, and when not certain of knowing which law is the truest and best, to be able to move from one to another’. In this sense it seemed senseless to him to die purely to avoid repudiating one’s faith. God himself had granted free will ‘so you can believe whatever you want and also do whatever you want’. In the enthusiasm of his speech he reached the point where he denied the divine origin of the commandments, saying that they had been ‘placed by men’; above all he had obtained an idea of evil as ‘that which you are aware of personally, know and retain to be evil ... as there is no other good than that which you personally retain to be good’. Therefore, everyone could and had to ‘use the light of reason, whether good or evil, because it was given to us by God’. Was it not perhaps true that God ‘was also involved in evil, as He is the master of our will’?

Mariani developed his own political and social vision based on these premises; in his opinion there was no ‘difference between people, but ... each person knows as much as the next, and ... God does not give more intellect or knowledge to one person rather than another’. Nobody could claim supremacy over other individuals because ‘this authority exerts compliance unjustly by human force’. This was exactly the case with the commandments, which he did not feel he had to obey as they had been created by men like him and as he did not accept a hierarchical view of the world under any circumstances. The first

¹⁸¹ Ibid., deposition by Don Giuseppe Serpieri on 30 January 1680.

¹⁸² Ibid., spontaneous appearance by Mariani on 19 December 1679.

¹⁸³ Ibid., defence deposition by Marietta Tubini on 17 September 1680.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., deposition by Mariani on 16 July 1680.

example of abuse that occurred to him was the pope, who as a man among men had no authority to approve or prohibit books. On the other hand, how could the pope discern good from bad books, if they were all written ‘with that light of reason given to us by God ... given the impossibility of really knowing which are the true and the best’?

Mariani continued in the same tone, despite the landlady’s invitations to look at the *Credo* again. The conversation then proceeded on two completely irreconcilable levels: the authorities were used as a point of reference by the woman and Cima, but were rejected by Mariani.¹⁸⁵ Recourse to the fathers of the Church was totally useless, as ‘everybody can write similar books in their own way and say what they like ... and he could write books in his own way, and say what he wanted’. What should have been a ‘mealtime’ conversation had turned into something completely different – a genuine dispute. However, it cannot have been anything completely new to the group in question, as the painter Carlo Mancini also remembered others, at least on the subject of authority.¹⁸⁶

Given the presence of Cima, the only possible solution was to let Mariani experience all the weight of the authorities he denied. His behaviour during the trial was especially shocking and clumsy, at least compared to the decidedly more sophisticated defence strategies seen in other trials. With the obvious exception of Cima, those that had witnessed his opinionated outbursts tried to downplay their importance. However, at the same time they were right to fear the Sant’Uffizio taking an interest in them, afraid that it might be proved that it was not the first time the witnesses had addressed such matters. The court must have taken this into account when a fairly moderate sentence was recorded on 22 April 1681: three years in prison with the usual opportunity to have the punishment reduced. Mariani was imprisoned on 16 July 1680. He was released following a plea one year later on 14 August 1681, with a warning to be more cautious in future.¹⁸⁷ It marked a total victory for Cima; the superiority and authority of a few men over other men, something which Mariani had denied, was also expressed through the ability to grant a kind pardon.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., document presented by Don Carlo Cima during the session on 5 December 1679.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., deposition by Carlo Mancini on 12 December 1679.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., sessions on 12 September 1680 and 22 April 1681. The actual sentence is not included in the documents; there is only a mention of the decision.

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Chapter 2

Reassembling Fragmentary Voices

Words

Discussions in public and private places regarding even the most controversial religious matters were certainly nothing new in urban areas on the peninsula and were not limited to Venice. According to a poet in the mid-sixteenth century, ‘The porter, the maid and the slave / constitute the anathomy of free will / and make a cake of predestination.’¹ As far back as 1540 Cardinal Morone’s vicar described Modena as follows: ‘This whole city ... is sullied, infected by different contagious heresies like Prague. In *botteghe*, street-corners, houses etc. everyone ... argues about faith, free will, purgatory, the Eucharist and predestination.’² Alessandro Caravia painted an identical picture of Venice at more or less the same time; uneducated people could be seen everywhere speaking like graduates, ‘theologizing out of all proportion’, addressing matters of the Scriptures in *botteghe* and at tailor shops or barbershops. It seemed that everybody felt qualified to be a theologian.³

¹ ‘Il fachin, la fantesca e lo schiavone / fan del libero arbitrio anathomia / e torta della predestinatione’: Pietro Nelli, *Il primo libro delle satire alla carlona di messer Andrea da Bergamo* (2 vols, Venice, 1566), c. 31r.

² The document is contained in *Il processo inquisitoriale del cardinale Giovanni Morone*, Massimo Firpo and Dario Marcatto (eds) (6 vols, Rome: Istituto storico italiano per l’età moderna e contemporanea, 1981–1989), vol. 2, p. 897.

³ Alessandro Caravia, *Il sogno dil Caravia* (Venice, 1541), c. B IIIv. On this topic, see Enrica Benini Clementi, *Riforma religiosa e poesia popolare a Venezia nel Cinquecento: Alessandro Caravia* (Florence: Olschki, 2000). The matter also had a theatrical component that was raised at the Council of Trent in March 1546, when the bishop of Senigallia, Marco Vigerio della Rovere, accused those who abused the Holy Scripture. There were many who were not entitled to handle it: vagabonds, apostates and hermits among others. He was also annoyed with charlatans who sang parts of it or sold extracts from their stalls, as they consequently introduced new superstitions. Then there were the fools who slandered the holy authorities not just orally but also by putting up pasquinades while everybody, including the objects of derision, looked on laughing at what Vigerio thought was blasphemy. The Council Decree on 8 April 1546 ordered that the episcopal courts should punish the guilty parties. The passage and the decree are quoted and analysed in Ottavia Niccoli, *Rinascimento*

The available documentation reveals clearly that such opportunities for meetings and exchanges linked to new forms of discussion and new issues grew significantly in Venice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There was a marked increase after the mid-seventeenth century, partly in unison with the war that saw the city employed once again against the Turks at Candia. As Gregorio Leti wrote in 1675, 'at present the Italians have become so familiar, so to speak, with the Catholic religion, that Italy is almost the least pious country within Europe, at least in appearance, because only God can judge what is inside'.⁴ Free will no longer constituted the main or sole element of conversations; the mortality of the soul was just as popular, along with the whole repertoire of libertine unbelief, connected to the political effects of religious belief, or rather the political use that had been made and was still made of religion.

The increase in the range of different places and opportunities for sociability, 'alternatives to the family, the Church, corporations and courts',⁵ led to increasingly frequent occasions on which individuals could express their ideas during publicly held discussions. However, except in a few cases sociability in Venice in the second half of the seventeenth century and the start of the eighteenth century was neither regulated nor institutionalized. This development would be largely a future one. While eighteenth-century Parisian booksellers promoted paid events like *cabinets de lecture*, their Venetian colleagues noted that many people met in *botteghe* to read, browse books, listen to readings from gazettes, have discussions and perhaps buy a book or two. Equally, whereas French salons were characterized by a rarefied atmosphere featuring conversations that adhered to the handbook of good manners, in which the refined enjoyment of daring conversation tended not to overstep certain boundaries, it was not rare for Venetian polite meetings between merchants, craftsmen and clergy among others to descend into exchanges of 'beco fotù' (roughly 'fucking cuckold'). For example, during a dinner party among friends in 1711, Davide Ricioi, a wine pourer, claimed that there was no need to appeal to saints. What was the point in 'calling Saint Antonio if Christ is there with open arms?'. He then made the unexpected point that even the Grisons obeyed the Commandments. Giuseppe Giusto saw this as offensive to Catholics, as it was tantamount to saying that

anticlericale. Infamia, propaganda e satira in Italia tra Quattro e Cinquecento (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2005), pp. 129–30.

⁴ Gregorio Leti, *L'Italia regnante. O vero nova descrizione dello stato presente di tutti prencipati, e repubbliche d'Italia* (2 vols, Geneva: Guglielmo e Pietro de la Pietra, 1675), vol. 1, book 3, p. 111.

⁵ Dena Goodman, 'Sociabilità', in Ferrone and Roche (eds), *L'Illuminismo. Dizionario storico*, p. 256.

they did not obey them. He asked for an explanation and was told ‘that I was an idiot and an ignorant’.⁶

Furthermore, discussions did not always remain within the confines of dialectics, so while they often descended into insults which were sometimes serious, just as often many of the arguments used have inevitably become elusive. We must also consider that these arguments were not always verbal. Indeed, there were those like Don Francesco Pedrini, who in 1697 used a harsh approach to try to change the mind of a heterodox believer unlucky enough to be present about God, the Mass and transubstantiation. The heterodox believer in question, an 18 year old who denied the existence of God and considered Mass to be a waste of time ‘when you worship a slice of bread’, must have had enough of the priest’s efforts to persuade him. Therefore, as the clergyman explained, ‘he recently rebelled by threatening that he would not bear being hit anymore. Actually, that last time when we were standing in the kitchen, he looked at a skewer: I feared for the worst and withdrew’.⁷

While social life had an extremely diverse and, so to speak, less elegant structure, less difference was apparent in the composition of an embryonic form of ‘public opinion’. People tended to use this field to learn and to compare their ideas with those of others. Discourses often fell on deaf ears, driven to a large degree by a competitive need for self-assertion, but there was still a basic opportunity for exchange in which opinions that individuals had made their own were brought into play. In this respect I therefore tend to use the definition of ‘public opinion’ in a functional and highly elementary way, taking it to mean nothing more than the sum of its two constituent terms. Maybe it would be better to talk of ‘opinions in public’. Starting from the assumption that sooner or later people tend to think and express what they think – or, as Hume claimed, that it is difficult to find someone ‘who had no opinion or principle concerning

⁶ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 136, trial against Davide Ricioi, deposition by Giuseppe Giusto on 27 April 1713.

⁷ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 129, Doctor Neri file, trial against Dario Doria, spontaneous appearance by Don Francesco Pedrini on 12 November 1697. Eighteen-year-old Dario Doria, a goldsmith, also spoke about such matters to his mother, who was however more of a sophist and tried the approach of rhetorical questions: ‘so you think you’re like animals, and cats, which are dead in every sense when their bodies die, which don’t have a reasoning soul?’. ‘Indeed’, answered Dario: *ibid.*, deposition by Meneghina Doria on 7 May 1699. Another unknown party stabbed Canon Sargnan repeatedly with a stiletto in 1697 while he was sipping coffee at Ponte dell’Angelo, before escaping ‘crying *mind the bull* to open a gap in the crowd’: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 615, report by Marco Marchetti on 20 February 1697. Lorenzo Franco was the victim of a more innocuous blow to the hand in a coffee house below the Procuracies in 1739: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 597, report by Lorenzo Franco on 9 November 1739.

any subject, either of action or speculation'⁸ – I would define public opinion here as the tendency to compare personal ideas shown by an adequate number of people at a given moment.⁹ In seventeenth-century Venice the trend had

⁸ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding; A Letter from a Gentleman to his Friend in Edinburgh; An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), p. 102.

⁹ It is clear that this is a functional definition for the subjects and period I am discussing. As Brendan Dooley underlines, a 'veritable "public opinion" in the sense enshrined in early twentieth-century sociology is nowhere to be found' in the seventeenth century: 'Introduction', in Brendan Dooley and Sabrina A. Baron (eds), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), p. 7. The discussion on the concept of 'public opinion' has been open for some time and there are some extremely refined definitions. The point of reference is clearly Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1989), which gave rise to wide-ranging debate focusing on the problem of applying the notion outside the chronological, geographical and social limits established by the German sociologist. The basic question is whether it is possible to extend the concept to periods before the eighteenth century, to different contexts from those in England, France and Germany, and to social groups that Habermas did not consider to be producers of public opinion. In terms of a relevant bibliography I will only mention Edoardo Tortarolo, 'Opinione pubblica', in Ferrone and Roche (eds), *L'Illuminismo. Dizionario storico*, pp. 283–91; James van Horn Melton, *The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). With regard to the application of the concept to different chronological areas, see the essays in *Rivista storica italiana*, 110 (1998) and especially Michele Olivari, *Fra trono e opinione. La vita politica castigliana nel Cinque e Seicento* (Venice: Marsilio, 2002), which claims that the term 'public opinion' can be used from the sixteenth century onwards and underlines that 'it would be necessary to understand its presence through its effects ... identify manifestations and variations in time and space, more than its "essence": it might be a question of a situation that can be understood by virtue of the dynamics that configure it, not by virtue of definitions': p. 222. With regard to 'pasquinate' and more generally anti-clerical production in the early sixteenth century, Ottavia Niccoli identifies 'common opinions and attitudes among broad sections of the citizenship, which might have significant cultural, religious or political weight and which are formed through a variety of means of communication'. It is therefore possible to speak of the 'formation of public opinion even with regard to anticlericalism in the sixteenth century', although it is not well defined or politically aware: Niccoli, *Rinascimento anticlericale*, p. 14. The Italian case has recently been analysed by Sandro Landi, *Naissance de l'opinion publique dans l'Italie moderne. Sagesse du peuple et savoir de gouvernement de Machiavel aux lumières* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2006). I have also focused particular attention on Arlette Farge, *Subversive Words: Public Opinion in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994). The author contests the formulation according to which the popular public sphere was repressed and so should not be considered, and analyses forms and contexts of popular speech that 'had no existence and no status: it was politically non-existent even while it was a commonplace of social action': p. 3. In the author's opinion, 'if we assume that any individual is competent

extended to a large number of individuals who used exchanges and debate to form their own ideas and enjoyed the process of acquisition and transmission.¹⁰ I think it could be said that the systems for validating personal thoughts and opinions were largely related to the opportunities to make them public. In this way reflections and theories gained strength in debates and exchanges, which as a result became increasingly sought after as enjoyable in themselves. As Antonio Pisani, a doctor, asserted in 1737, 'above all one could converse' and express doubt, and he answered the man who pointed out that one could consequently even question whether 'it was true that we were speaking' with a degree of satisfaction by saying that 'we could say something about that too'.¹¹

The continuous acceleration in the number of contacts and discussions was the result of a centuries-old process that certainly did not go unchallenged, but which increased markedly in the mid-seventeenth century. It brought an increasingly large section of the population into contact with a variety of issues

to criticize, then by tracing the history of that competence we may be able to determine the sphere within that criticism can be active. Indeed, grumbles and expressions of public discontent are the real interest only if we take care to connect them with the sphere which is allotted to them. That sphere itself is shifting and multiple, so that we will do well to "hook" the complainings on to a multiplicity of different phenomena': p. 4.

¹⁰ Some historians have proposed an interpretative key for England which could to some extent also be applied to the context of the Italian states, at least with regard to certain urban settings: the notion of an 'early modern public sphere' which, developing as a result of the huge variety of means of communication from the late sixteenth century onwards, would have led to widespread politicization at all levels of society: Alexandra Halasz, *The Marketplace of Print: Pamphlets and the Public Sphere in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Kevin Sharpe, *Remapping Early Modern England: The Culture of Seventeenth-Century Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). On the aspect of 'popular' public opinion, see Adam Fox, 'Rumour, News and Popular Opinion in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England', *Historical Journal*, 40 (1997): 597–620; Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (eds), *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain, 1500–1850* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002). According to a different interpretation, the real change happened at the beginning of the 1640s: see, among others, Pincus, "Coffee Politicians Does Create"; Daniel Woolf, 'News, History and the Construction of the Present in Early Modern England', in Dooley and Baron (eds), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 80–118. This is clearly abstract reasoning about the connotations that can be attributed to the concept of the 'public sphere', whether it should be taken as a breaking point in political culture or in some way be defined on the basis of the distribution of information and the principle of questioning authorities and sources. On these aspects, see the complete critical review by Mario Caricchio, 'Rivoluzione inglese e sfera pubblica. Spunti per un'interpretazione', *Storica*, 23 (2002): 29–69, at pp. 40–41 and 44–5.

¹¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 142, trial against Antonio Pisani, deposition by Abbot Antonio Gavisini on 14 March 1737.

and consequently gave them access to doctrines that were sometimes complex. Although these theories were somewhat distorted when they were circulated, they nevertheless spread autonomously and started to exist as distinct entities independently from books or structured complex discourses. In this new life where they were whispered or shouted, they imploded and atomized. However, despite bearing the signs of multiple autonomous reinterpretations, they continued to circulate. A surprising number of people felt qualified to debate matters of philosophy, or rather ideas removed from their original interpretative context that were first filtered by processes of delivery and reception and then passed through different social layers to reach a huge audience in renewed or modified form. The results were clear to see: people questioned the dogma of faith with an iconoclastic spirit, held discussions and adopted a mocking attitude towards common beliefs about this and the other world.

Attempts to classify the individual paths through which discourses were distilled and individuals ended up embracing heterodox ideas were clearly doomed to fail, as they were linked to the lives and personalities of these same individuals. They can therefore only be approached in an approximate way. In 1647 Faustina Cortesia reached the conclusion that God, the Madonna and the saints did not exist, given that she had invoked them to no avail. She continued by establishing 'that everything is done at random' and that 'I would have become a Turk to be cured' of the illness that was afflicting her and had caused her to turn to God. Her state of mind also made her 'extremely perplexed about the immortality of the soul'.¹² In 1655 Giovan Francesco Vantaggi, a *tiraoro* (gold drawer), only needed to hear that St Joseph was not as old as he had been depicted to conclude that 'he had carnal knowledge of the Blessed Virgin' and to try to convince his wife and many others that he was right.¹³ Instead, in 1712 Vincenzo Barbetta, a cleric, became convinced that the pope was not the Vicar of Christ because he had seen him in Rome without his triregnum,¹⁴ while 30 years later Antonio Zanella, a Brescian peasant, made reference to irrefutable empirical data to deny the immortality of the soul and the existence of hell. With regard to the former point, it was clear to him that 'as even the hardest iron wears out, the soul must be consumed too as it is less hard than iron'. Besides,

¹² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 103, Salvatore Caravagio file, trial against Faustina Cortesia, spontaneous appearance by Faustina on 28 April 1647.

¹³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 108, Carlo Vanali file, trial against Carlo Vanali, spontaneous appearance by Giovan Francesco Vantaggi on 19 March 1655.

¹⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 135, Vincenzo Barbetta file, trial against Vincenzo Barbetta, spontaneous appearance by Don Francesco Marino on 11 January 1712 before the Inquisitor of Brescia. The deposition was enclosed with a letter sent on 28 January and read at the Venetian *Sant'Uffizio* on 14 April 1712.

there would have been a simple problem of overcrowding given that ‘if the soul was not consumed, the whole world would be full of souls’. As far as hell was concerned ‘he kept hell painted on some paper, and ... as he didn’t see any souls enter he deduced that there was no hell.’¹⁵

At the beginning of the eighteenth century Giovanni Bresciani was out of work and his family resources did not enable him to improve his condition. His reflections must have originated from his personal situation: how could God provide for so many bad people but abandon him? He clearly did not see himself as so bad. This consideration of an autobiographical nature interacted with a series of questions – of which he probably already had a somewhat confused perception – about divine justice. He asked himself why God had allowed Judas to betray Christ and Adam to pick the apple, thereby condemning both to damnation. God had certainly not shown Himself to be fair and Giovanni became convinced that he had to go to Geneva ‘and preach against the faith of Christ there’. However, he never managed to do so; he spoke about it to many people and concluded that he should go to the Sant’Uffizio and confess his thoughts.¹⁶ It was 1709 and he had to consider that in any case he needed to find answers to both his existential and financial problems. He therefore joined the Augustinian monks in Treviso as a novice, but immediately found grounds to quarrel with the master of the novices and was defrocked without being reimbursed the money he had paid upon entering the monastery. Such an injustice simply triggered his propensity to build a causal nexus and made him return to the ideas that he had tried to abandon even more convinced than before. In this way he moved rapidly from criticizing the behaviour of monks to religion itself. On the other hand, it was not rare to move from anti-clerical positions to a more structured form of irreligiousness. Overcome with rage, and here I think it is better to let him speak for himself, he declared to many that the religion in question was responsible for a lot of roguery:

¹⁵ ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 54, letter from the *podestà* of Brescia, Antonio Savorgnan, of 5 November 1741. The characteristics and destiny of the soul – a matter which was widely debated in a lively way, as we shall see – was also a cause of reflection for Antonio, an octogenarian. He repeated that the soul was ‘a mere trifle’ and was amazed that God took care of it. If forced to admit that it existed, ‘his opinion is that the soul is subject to the body, that the body is what commits sin, and that therefore the body and not the soul must be punished’. He did not even see the need to pose himself the problem of whether or not his reasoning made sense, given that if he had been making a mistake, God would have sent him a clear sign to make him come to his senses. As for the Last Judgement, he had not found a ‘book or person’ that could specify when it would happen, and so he did not believe that it would.

¹⁶ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 136, trial against Giovanni Bresciani and Antonio Legrenzi, spontaneous appearance by Giovanni Bresciani on 26 March 1709.

and that investiture was introduced to eat up people's money. From this discourse and from this thought of mine I turned my mind to reflect on the dispensations which are obtained from Rome, and reflecting that in order to obtain dispensations and indulgences you need to spend money, I began to doubt whether you should believe in the pope, when he did everything out of self-interest, and that as a consequence not even our law was good. I went further, and started to doubt whether the mystery of the incarnation was true, telling myself that the Madonna was a woman like all the others, that it was not possible for God to have sent his son to take human form in the womb of a woman similar to the others who had been born into this world too. In addition, I believed that the resurrection of the dead was false, indeed I believed that the death of men was similar to the death of animals, so that I denied that our soul was reasoning, saying that it was only sensory, and that after this life I didn't believe there was anything else. Pondering over the apple forbidden to Adam and reflecting that God had forbidden it, also knowing that Adam wouldn't obey Him, I deduced as a consequence that if God knew this but nevertheless prohibited it, it was a sign that God wanted us to be evil and caused us to be so. Furthermore I started to hate all things ecclesiastical, namely all the services that they have in church, telling myself that there was nothing there that was good, and so I continued with this false belief for a period of almost three years, and I expressed it in two ways: sometimes I openly expressed the abovementioned heresies as my own convictions, other times I pretended to report them as arguments put forward by heretics. I did so in discussions with Bastian Nelli, a surgeon and my mentor, when we were alone: he inspired me and solved my doubts.

He consequently took his rebellion to the utmost extreme by invoking the devil, even though he had previously claimed that he did not believe in him, in order to give him his soul in exchange for favours. He did not obtain much from this, except even firmer knowledge of the non-existence of life after death. He subsequently sneered mockingly at people he saw bowing before the altar, before finding some consolation in the figure of Antonio Legrenzi, the 18-year-old son of a cloth merchant, who had 'the same feelings' as him. Every time that they met in the street or elsewhere:

we both took heart in not believing in anything, that is that there is no hell, or purgatory, or heaven, or a real pope, or God, or sacraments, or the Blessed Virgin, and we said to each other speaking about the Blessed Virgin: she should go and spin, she would better be spinning. And on one day, I don't remember in which year, or in which season, or in which place, on seeing a painted crucifix Legrenzi turned to me and said while smiling and jeering at it: look look, they say that

this is Christ. Che mustazzo da Giuda (roughly He's a Judas look-alike), and I applauded him and agreed with him.

This reciprocal action of taking heart to persevere in their incredulity was the main voluntary component of their unbelief. They continued to cultivate it by visiting churches together for the pleasure of making fun of those taking part in the service. When the priest raised the host, they said in turn: 'they are lifting the Lord, look the Lord is over there, look at those who are worshipping the Lord' and then laughed.¹⁷

Once again, however, the 'synderesis' that Bresciani heard led him to appear before the Inquisitor of his own accord. Two months later he was followed by Legrenzi.¹⁸ They both abjured without any further consequences and the Sant'Uffizio never learnt anything more about what they believed thereafter.

Themes

The expression of personal dissent and the debates that often followed were a daily occurrence played out in coffee houses, the street or private homes. Every subject was discussed and each person could express – many felt qualified and almost obliged to do so – his personal interpretation not only regarding things in this world such as news of a political and military nature, but also in the next world and matters of faith. This was done by putting forward arguments that were often incoherent and questions that were ill-defined, diverse in nature and equally often simplified. However, these fragments of discourses tended to accumulate and take shape around certain themes which were perceived with greater urgency or which simply already had an available vocabulary and a more elaborate or richer repertoire of feelings, thoughts and expressions.

The soul

Intense speculation and debate surrounded the matter of the destiny of the soul after death. Personal interpretations were offered that tended to question orthodox doctrine and sometimes even led to an openly anti-Christian outcome. A 1513 decree by the Fifth Lateran Council had condemned any doctrine which

¹⁷ Ibid., spontaneous appearance by Giovanni Bresciani on 10 October 1713.

¹⁸ Ibid., spontaneous appearances by Antonio Legrenzi on 24 December 1713 and 15 March 1714.

called into question the immortality of the soul.¹⁹ What it effectively did was to order philosophers to put forward the Christian truth during lessons and discussions about the soul. Their worries were actually well founded as it was a matter that raised great interest, especially in groups associated with heterodox Aristotelianism and above all those influenced by Averroism. Although it had been exerting some hold on European culture for at least 300 years by the end of the fifteenth century with the 'return of Plato' and the 'discovery of Lucretius', the question had become pressing enough by then to justify decisive intervention by the Church authorities.²⁰ Despite this ban there was no lack of thinkers from the start – Pomponazzi was one emblematic case, but we should also mention Telesio, Cisalpino and Cardano among others – who produced works which provided easy access to arguments in favour of the mortality of the soul with varying degrees of explicitness.²¹ These variously simplified arguments were already widespread in the sixteenth century, but during the course of the following century they reached a much wider audience as a result of vulgarization, which made them more familiar and accessible. While the vocabulary, the reasoning and the terms of the question had not significantly changed since the sixteenth century, or developed as a result of erudite libertinism, the impact of such reflections assumed considerable proportions. Indeed, there was widespread support for discrediting the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, characterized by constant recourse to images that questioned it vividly and effectively, even for those who were not especially familiar with theories of the double truth

¹⁹ See Eric A. Constant, 'A Reinterpretation of the Fifth Lateran Council Decree *Apostolici regiminis* (1513)', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 33 (2002): 353–79.

²⁰ Adriano Prosperi, *Dare l'anima. Storia di un infanticidio* (Turin: Einaudi, 2005), p. 230.

²¹ On the Catholic doctrine regarding the immortality of the soul, see 'Âme', in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique* (18 vols, Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1967), vol. 1, pp. 968–1041 and Giovanni Di Napoli, *L'immortalità dell'anima nel Rinascimento* (Turin: SEI, 1963). On the questioning of the doctrine, see George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Kirkville: Truman State University Press, 2000) and Aldo Stella, *Dall'anabattismo al socinanesimo nel Cinquecento veneto. Ricerche storiche* (Padua: Liviana, 1967), pp. 37–44. On developments, in particular in Pomponazzi's work, see: Vittoria Perrone Compagni, 'Introduzione', in Pietro Pomponazzi, *Trattato sull'immortalità dell'anima*, V, Perrone Compagni (ed.) (Florence: Olschki, 1999), pp. v–ci. On the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century debate, see Giuseppe Ricuperati, 'Il problema della corporeità dell'anima dai libertini ai deisti', in Sergio Bertelli (ed.), *Il libertinismo in Europa* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1980), pp. 369–415 and *La città terrena di Pietro Giannone*, pp. 126–9. Of fundamental importance in the Christian concept of the 'soul' is Prosperi, *Dare l'anima*, in particular pp. 218–99. For the role of the doctrine in the Jewish community, see Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Heresy: Immortality and the Jewish Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

or the question of the unity of the intellect. Therefore, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even at a popular level, fairly uniform formulations gave voice and channelled a form of criticism that was sometimes not clearly perceived but which provided a formidable instrument for the expression of openly heterodox positions. In this way the human soul was at different times variously compared – as we saw in Chapter 1 – to smoke from a cooking pot or associated with linguistic elements that lowered its status – the soul was like that of a dog or a capon²² – or was subjected to a pun, like the one coined by Nicolò Rompiasio in 1722: man's soul was 'like the soul of a button', where the soul took on the meaning of a buttonhole.²³ The idea that the soul died along with the body or, as Matteo Roder claimed in 1681, did not exist at all²⁴ was widespread and frequently addressed; Francesco Tomasini from Vicenza was so used to dealing with people stating this that he prepared an argument 'against this error'²⁵ in the 1680s.

Some offered an organicist vision, which sometimes also included anatomical suggestions: in the 1650s Don Carlo Filiotti claimed that the soul resided in a man's seed,²⁶ while in the 1670s Teodoro Stricher spoke about the hostility and difficulty of forgiveness, arguing that 'blood is moved by revenge, and many doctors say that the soul is in the blood'.²⁷ He consequently questioned

²² The comparison with capons was a particularly widespread one. One of the others who made use of it was *rational* Venetian Domenico Gavagnin in around 1690 – 'What do capons know when they are dead ... all the difference between capons and us comes down to the fact that we eat capons and they do not eat us' (ASV file, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 126, Fontanato Giovan Battista file, trial against Domenico Gavagnin, spontaneous appearance by Francesca Canciani on 13 March 1692, c. 1v) – and Brescian tailor Eugenio Guerrini in 1743 – 'when a man dies there is nothing more for him, which is what happens to capons' (ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 56, letter from the Captain of Brescia Almorò Barbaro of 25 April 1743).

²³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 139, trial against Nicolò Rompiasio, deposition by Margherita Castiglioni on 14 July 1722, c. 4v. On the meaning of the soul with reference to a button, see the entry 'boton' in Boerio, *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano*.

²⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 122, trial against Matteo Roder, spontaneous appearance by Giovan Carlo Malipiero on 27 February 1681.

²⁵ Unfortunately the *Sant'Uffizio* informer was not able to repeat the argument: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, Melchiorre Satellico file, trial against Domenico Chiesa, spontaneous appearance by Giovanni Lorando on 19 April 1689.

²⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 107, trial against Don Carlo Filiotti, declaration by Don Carlo on 13 March 1653, c. 31v.

²⁷ This was not a new position: already in 1577, for example, Costantino Tessera, a 90-year-old gold-beater originally from Trebisonda, was overheard saying that 'our soul is nothing more than our blood', which died along with the body. In his opinion 'we are like wheat, grown out of a seed, which is no longer there, but has generated others, and so on':

the ability to prolong the life of the soul and tried to enjoy life in this world as much as he could, because he did not really believe in life after death. He told Francesco Priuli, who had reprimanded him for not being a Christian, that he was the more Christian of the two ‘because as a learned man he had read and knew what he was saying’.²⁸

There were also those who offered alternative interpretations, such as Placido Gaeta, a blind beggar from Messina more commonly known as Antonio. In his way of seeing things – in the 1660s – ‘after death our souls enter a dog, a cat, another animal or a gutter, or a loo’.²⁹ He built a personal cosmology around this basic conviction connected to a figurative interpretation of the Catholic afterlife and claimed:

that there is no hell, and there is no purgatory either in the way that they say, that is there is no fire, and that sometimes God sends souls into streets, brothels, and the bellies of animals, and that this is purgatory. And that there is no hell or purgatory other than the division between God and the soul, because the soul cannot see God, and he said that it is true that when one wants to see a relative or sweetheart and one cannot, one feels a great longing, and this is that fire that they say is in hell, and purgatory, and on being reprimanded about this ... the blind man replied that it is as he said, that he knows this and will demonstrate it.³⁰

Instead, in 1680 Marco Visonio seemed convinced that ‘everyone can be saved and that nobody is damned, given that God has created them to replace demons in Paradise. Therefore, if someone went to Hell, God would have been lying and would not have kept his promise’.³¹ In 1721 Elena Benedetti from Mestre confessed that she had heard, without remembering where or from whom, ‘that

ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 41, trial against Costantino Tessera, spontaneous appearance by gold-beater Andrea on 23 April 1577.

²⁸ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 117, trial against Teodoro Stricher, spontaneous appearance by Francesco Priuli on 10 April 1674.

²⁹ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 115, trial against Antonio Gaeta, deposition by Giovanni Raffaele on 20 September 1668. Gaeta’s real first name was Placido, even if everybody knew him as Antonio, his father’s name: *ibid.*, deposition by Placido on 20 August 1669.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, spontaneous appearance by Giovanni Raffaele on 18 September 1668. According to Raffaele, he reported the matter because he feared Fra’ Placido’s negative influence on his father Giovanni, who must have seemed especially weak to him as he had been born a heretic and then converted to Catholicism.

³¹ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 121, trial against Marco Visonio, known as Bollani, undated letter of denunciation from Michele Paganin. I made an exact transcription of the text because I felt it was interesting to understand the writer’s level of literacy.

dead souls return to a woman's womb, and return to the world'.³² A huge range of channels made it possible to come into contact with a series of modified elements taken from a variety of traditions of thought. For example, visitors to the house of the *residente* (a diplomatic agent) of Mantua in 1711 had the opportunity to listen to the speeches of Antonio Zane, a bandit, who put forward his idea of transmigration forcefully and quite effectively, stating 'that our soul is nothing, this shitty soul, and that when the body dies the soul passes to a dog or even another animal, as it is determined'. He found support for his theory in the anthropological-style observation which has previously been mentioned: he considered 'the customs of the Greeks, who after burying a corpse put some bread and wine in a bowl to provide refreshment to that soul before moving into a different body'.³³

In this instance the blasphemous rejection of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul had probably been gradually strengthened by new elements put together more as a result of assonance than of deep reflection. However, although the channels were numerous and undefined, the forms of transmission were extremely uncertain and the results were unpredictable, it is evident that a range of topics – like the theories of Pythagoras and Bruno on the transmigration of souls which stimulated philosophical discussions all over Europe – found staunch and above all vociferous supporters in Venice.³⁴ It is also certain that as

³² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 139, Margherita Mazzer file, deposition by Elena Benedetti on 29 May 1721.

³³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, trial against Antonio Zane, deposition by Domenico Rivagio, known as Caldana, on 5 May 1711.

³⁴ In the 1680s the Carmelite Fra' Elia Borghi made no mystery of the fact that he supported the doctrine 'that all animals, even the irrational ones, have their guardian angel': ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, trial against Fra' Elia Borghi, spontaneous appearance by Fra' Nicola Zanolini on 21 January 1687. Perhaps implicitly, Fra' Elia seemed to be referring to the discussion on the soul of animals, which was particularly lively during the seventeenth century. It is clearly difficult to establish whether he did this knowingly, whether he was reasoning about elements that came from elsewhere or whether he had developed the idea autonomously. The discussion about the soul of animals actually constituted an important aspect of the philosophical debate that the late seventeenth century bequeathed to the following century. Descartes engaged in it in *Discours de la méthode*, Fontenelle did the same in many works, followed by Gassendi, *Cyrano de Bergerac* and there is the entry *Rorarius* in Bayle's *Dictionnaire*, just to quote a few. On the matter, see in brief Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World. Changing Attitudes in England: 1500–1800* (London: Allen Lane, 1983), Chapter 3; for a more indepth discussion, see Leonora Cohen-Rosenfield, *From Beast-Machine to Man-Machine: The Theme of Animal Soul in French Letters from Descartes to La Mettrie* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968²); Maria T. Marcialis, *Filosofia e psicologia animale. Da Rorario a Leroy* (Cagliari: STEF, 1982) and 'Alle origini della questione dell'anima delle bestie: i libertini e la ragione strumentale', in G. Solinas (ed.), *Saggi sull'Illuminismo*

a result of all the reasoning on the destiny of the soul after death, many perhaps instinctively developed legitimate worries regarding questions that required closer analysis of the body too, such as salvation or damnation.

Salvation and damnation

As we have seen, there was little constancy in depictions of the afterlife. They varied in the way it was adapted in concrete terrestrial terms and in the denial or acceptance of the fact that nothing sensible could be said about it, as the world of the dead was the very essence of ineffability. There was a widespread tendency among those who claimed that salvation was possible to believe that it could be achieved irrespective of one's professed religion and that the idea of damnation could therefore be discarded *a priori*. The result was that Christianity no longer had exclusivity with regard to salvation; it was replaced by an extended notion of salvation available to everyone. As the painter Domenico Chiesa remembered in 1689, 'the faithless inhabitants of the mountains where they do not hear the word of God or have any education, went to heaven'.³⁵ In addition, according to the *sanser* (intermediary) Benedetto Pelliccioli in 1694, 'those who live a good moral life do not go to hell, even if they were not baptized ... because those who cause no harm cannot be damned'. Indeed, only Judas had been damned 'for faith'.³⁶ Pietro Ormesini reached similar conclusions at around the same time, although he limited the number of those saved to those who had been baptized, meaning that all baptized Christians were destined for heaven: 'no baptized soul will ever be found in hell ... we just have to observe two precepts: namely love God and love thy neighbour, and ... by observing these two precepts alone, without going to Mass, without telling our beads or reciting the rosary, we will go to heaven'.³⁷

(Cagliari: STEF, 1973), pp. 319–411; Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert and Susan Wiseman (eds), *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999); Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals. Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002) and *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006). On Girolamo Rorario, also with regard to certain aspects of the problem of the soul of animals, see Aidée Scala, *Girolamo Rorario. Un umanista diplomatico del Cinquecento e i suoi Dialoghi* (Florence: Olschki, 2004).

³⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, Melchiorre Satellico file, trial against Domenico Chiesa, spontaneous appearance by Giovanni Lorando on 19 April 1689.

³⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 128, Fra' Girolamo da Feltre file, trial against Benedetto Pelliccioli, spontaneous appearance by Angela Morandi on 2 September 1694.

³⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 127, trial against Pietro Ormesini, deposition by Giacomo Gelmini on 7 February 1692.

In 1722 Nicolò Rompiasio, who we have already encountered, could not believe that Christ had let Jews, Turks, Calvinists and Lutherans be born in order to damn them to hell.³⁸ These positions partly marked a return to the discussion of free will, a burning question that included contradictions which were deemed to require urgent solutions. Such solutions often took the form of denial or were provided in a more sophisticated way by transforming the doctrine into something else so that it entered the field of natural religion or the law of nature.³⁹ The strong Catholic reaction to Lutheran doctrine made the issue of free will potentially explosive. The stress placed on freedom of action and the opportunity for man to be the agent of his salvation through his works provided a basic theory with numerous evident variations for stating that human actions could not be sinful as God had left men the freedom to decide, and in His infinite goodness God could not have wanted man to be damned. In keeping with this tradition, Fra' Elia Borghi stated that the vow of chastity was not binding for friars and argued his case in social terms – 'friars are placed into religion at an immature age, when they don't know what they are doing, and take the vow'. The conclusion he reached was precisely the argument of human freedom: 'and as we have free will, we cannot be obliged to observe that vow'.⁴⁰

These conclusions were probably linked to a Latitudinarian attitude already shown by sixteenth-century Italian reformers, a tradition aimed at offering an 'open road' towards salvation which was supported by reading the Lutheran doctrine of justification that was especially widespread in the territories of the

³⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 139, trial against Nicolò Rompiasio, spontaneous appearance by Matteo Scaglioni on 9 July 1722, c. 2v. Similar formulations had been circulated since at least the late sixteenth century. Already in 1580 Heremite Fra' Lorenzo from Venice claimed that even unbelievers could be saved by observing their law: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 46, trial against Fra' Lorenzo da Venezia. Only a few years later in 1584, Menocchio, a miller, expressed the idea that 'God's majesty has given the Holy Ghost to everyone: to Christians and heretics, Turks, Jews, and loves them all, and all are saved in the same way': *Domenico Scandella detto Menocchio. I processi dell'Inquisizione (1583–1599)*, A. Del Col (ed.) (Pordenone: Edizioni Biblioteca dell'Immagine, 1990), p. 64, declaration on 27 April 1584. See also Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 20.

³⁹ 'La loi de nature est la vraie règle d'un honnête homme, pour qu'il pratique ce premier point, quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris': *Naudaeana et Patiniana*, p. 66. See, among the many examples in Venice, Abbot Giovan Domenico Bonlini: 'everyone is saved in his sect ... but by living according to the law of nature': ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 142, trial against Giovan Domenico Bonlini, spontaneous appearance by Don Innocenzo Cherubini on 30 January 1738.

⁴⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, trial against Fra' Elia Borghi, deposition by Fra' Tommaso Zelis on 23 January 1687.

Republic.⁴¹ However, they were also equally indebted to trends of thought and suggestions which had been presented many times over the centuries from the *Novella dei Tre Anelli* (*Novella of the Three Rings*) and *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, through *The Novellino* to Boccaccio and the oral tradition.⁴² The Averroist tradition was also part of the background setting for these formulations. It first won influence among the patriciate and then gradually extended to increasingly wider fields as a result of the cultural status of the University of Padua. To summarize, the principles of universal redemption were fuelled by an extremely disparate array of cultural motives and experience. While the Lutheran influx was a determining factor in giving them shape in addition to the others previously mentioned, different concerns probably intervened to create favourable states of mind for the spread of the idea. For example, there was the theological and existential problem of babies that died without being baptized, the issue of non-evangelized societies excluded *a priori*

⁴¹ 'Inquisitorial documentation confirms the hypothesis that the Lutheran principle of *certitudo salutis* or *certitudo electionis* had a significant hold on people's consciences.' The corollary of this doctrine was the dissolution of purgatory, which however 'never worked to the benefit of hell. It regularly produced an extended heaven.' This topic is broadly addressed in Silvana Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus in Italia. 1520–1580* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1987), in particular Chapter 4, 'Il cielo aperto, ovvero l'infinita misericordia di Dio', pp. 143–67, at pp. 146 and 148. Also important is Carlo Ginzburg and Adriano Prosperi, *Giochi di pazienza. Un seminario sul 'Beneficio di Cristo'* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), pp. 13–15. For an original interpretation of the Venetian case, see Enrico De Mas, *Sovranità politica e unità cristiana nel Seicento anglo-veneto* (Ravenna: Longo, 1975) and *L'attesa del secolo aureo (1603–1625). Saggio di storia delle idee del secolo XVII* (Florence: Olschki, 1982).

⁴² After enjoying widespread distribution in manuscript form, the *Tractato de le più maravigliose cose e più notabile, che si trovano in le parti del mondo da strenuissimo cavalier speron d'oro Johanne da Mandavilla* was published by Corvino in Milan in 1480. There was subsequently a series of other editions with partially modified titles. I used *Johanne de Mandavilla, qual tratta delle più maravegliose cose e più notabile che si trovino [...] stampato in Venetia per Alvise di Torti, nell'anno del Signore 1534, nel mese di agosto*. The *Novella dei tre anelli* was inserted into the *Novellino* at the end of the thirteenth century, nov. 73: 'Come il soldano, avendo mestiere di moneta, volle cogliere cagione a un giudeo.' It was subsequently taken up again by Boccaccio in the *Decameron* I, 3: 'Melchizedek the Jew, with a story about three rings, avoids a most dangerous trap laid for him by Saladin.' Unsurprisingly, the novella in the style of Boccaccio incurred church censorship and was either cut or rewritten. Nevertheless, some unexpurgated editions of the *Decameron* must have been in circulation, giving rise to fairly widespread handwritten distribution during the period in question. A complete edition was available from 1718 onwards, printed in Naples with a false date in Amsterdam. There is an accomplished reconstruction of the publishing events regarding the *Decameron* in Naples in Mario Ajello, *L'inchiostro del Diavolo. Storie di censura, stampa clandestina, preti e castrati nella Napoli del '700* (Florence: Ponte alle Grazie, 1998), pp. 30, 67 and 93–5.

from the possibility of salvation, or the increasing presence of Jews expelled from Spain in Italy, which ‘led consciences to believe in the possibility that the paths of redemption branched out infinitely and allowed glimpses of the mirage of tolerance at a practical level of cohabitation.’⁴³

From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards this implicit statement of religious tolerance became fairly widely established, also because it tallied with other theories that tended to deny the unique and essential nature of Catholicism in favour of a ‘natural religion’ aimed at underlining the morality of an individual’s behaviour and common traits instead of differences from other confessions. However, it could also boast other persuasive and perhaps unexpected means of circulation: readers of the second *Vigilia* in *L’Anima* by *Ferrante Pallavicino* could learn that ‘Christ shed his most precious blood for everyone, even for infidels, heretics and idolaters.’⁴⁴ In 1651 Don Carlo Filiotti supported the same concept by resorting to almost identical words when discussing the matter with Zuanne, the Foscolo family’s chamberlain: ‘Christ our Lord shed his precious blood for everybody, and ... there was no need for confessions or communions.’⁴⁵ In the same year, a doubtful friar in the convent of San Pietro in Murano who was worried about the fate of the soul of the King of England, who had died ‘in his law’, was told by a brother ‘that this is our idiocy and that everyone is saved in his own law.’⁴⁶ A 1689 conversation on a public road between clergymen and public officers went more or less along these lines:

the named mister Flaminio asked if the Elector of Brandenburg had died. The aforementioned gentleman answered yes, and a priest replied that he was sorry, but that surely he would be in Paradise. Mister Flaminio added ‘how can he possibly be in Paradise, if he allowed Protestants in his house?’ The other one responded ‘what is the problem? How does it matter? For God’s sake, everyone

⁴³ Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus in Italia*, p. 152. One of Menocchio’s main convictions was that it was possible for everyone to be saved, and on this matter Carlo Ginzburg has discerned traces of ‘a popular current – of which so far very little is known – favouring toleration, a few traces of which can be discerned in the course of the sixteenth century’: Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, p. 49. See also the critical observations of Paola Zambelli, ‘Uno, due, tre, mille Menocchio? Della generazione spontanea (o della cosmogonia “autonoma” di un mugnaio cinquecentesco)’, *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 1 (1979): 51–90.

⁴⁴ Giovanni F. Loredano, *L’anima di Ferrante Pallavicino, divisa in sei vigilie* (6 vols, Cologne, 1675), vol. 2, p. 9.

⁴⁵ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 107, trial against Don Carlo Filiotti, deposition by Don Giovan Battista Balduino on 26 November 1652, c. 8r.

⁴⁶ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 106, Caterina Tordana file, trial against Fra’ Tommaso Onorio, spontaneous appearance by Fra’ Girolamo Pranda on 3 February 1651.

is saved in his own faith'. To which Flaminio said: 'Everyone is saved in his own faith? That's fanciful!'⁴⁷

The search for the possibility of salvation beyond one's practised confession was the expression of a lack of confidence in a set of rules, dogma, prohibitions and prescriptions which seemed to make the life of a believer irreparably harsher and led to the subsequent attempt to overstep what religion had accomplished in a worldly and historical sense to focus on its transcendent origins. It is difficult to determine how much overlap there was between the god referred to in these instances and the one offered by the Church or traditionally seen as such: his attributes and the idea people had of him might not have been so far removed from the tradition. He was certainly a divinity that extended his control and benevolence over everyone, regardless of the ways in which they worshipped and sometimes did not believe. The authorities feared that a God big enough to be able to embrace all faiths would lose definition, becoming something vague and difficult to identify, and running the risk of becoming difficult to represent. He would end up disappearing altogether. This was just one of the starting points for the denial of His existence.

'Roasted Christs and burned images'

It is a difficult, perhaps even impossible undertaking to offer a plausible overview of unbelief in a context such as Venice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The explicit or implied denial of the existence of God or His main attributes and the evidence presented in support of this conviction during the conversations that followed give the impression of a mild form of unbelief, a world in which the boundaries between believing, not believing and believing 'wrongly' were quite unstable and constantly being crossed. Just as it was possible to believe superficially, it was also possible to not believe in an equally superficial way.⁴⁸ Moments in time and the available intellectual tools and vocabulary were characterized by a gradual nature, so even the most animated

⁴⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 129, trial against Father Pietro Alvisé Fontana, Dean of Concordia, deposition by Don Fabiano Fabiani to the Sant'Uffizio of Concordia on 12 May 1689.

⁴⁸ Giovanni Scarabello wrote with regard to the work of the Venetian Inquisition in the seventeenth century that rather than lives in opposition, 'lives of steadfast dissidence, one has the sensation of irreverent or cynically scornful lives': Giovanni Scarabello, 'Paure, superstizioni, infamie', in *Storia della cultura veneta. Il Seicento* (10 vols, Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1982), vol. 4/II, pp. 343–76, at p. 374.

denial of the existence of God or the soul did not always entail a denial of the afterlife in general. For example, the next world always came in useful to those who wanted to invoke demons or make pacts with the devil to obtain financial or sexual gratification or to guarantee protection for whatever reason. However, the denial of the existence of demons – the consequence of failed invocations – fairly frequently evolved into a more general dissolution of the Christian afterlife.⁴⁹

Another matter to consider is the ways in which people expressed their unbelief or general non-conformism. As we have seen, religious dissent manifested itself through an extremely diverse range of expressive forms which are difficult to define on the basis of models. In this context even formulations which were simplified or reduced to their minimum terms sometimes constituted forms of expression and distribution of feelings of unbelief or ideas that were probably more elaborate than they appeared when expressed. Blasphemy was a boundary case; it was such a common, well-established element of conversation that a separate magistracy – the Esecutori conto la bestemmia – was specially devoted to curbing the most extraordinary manifestations of the phenomenon, as it was felt that it could seriously endanger society and the safety of the state.⁵⁰ The thin line that separated heretical blasphemy from the ordinary variety, a simple explosion of rage which did not question God's divine attributes, was barely visible. In any case it was accepted in terms of doctrine that a blasphemer was not *ipso facto* considered to be heretical. The matter was also important from a legal point of view, given that the Venetian government rigidly followed a practice which was then codified by Sarpi:

the excesses of ordinary blasphemy must not be left to the office of the Inquisition, but judged at the secular court, in accordance with the provisions of the law and the customs of all Christianity ... Blasphemy termed heretical, which

⁴⁹ From this, although on the one hand there was a major focus of attention on doctrines that tended to deny the existence of the devil, on the other hand great importance was attributed to exorcism. On these aspects, see the cases quoted in Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli*, pp. 131–45.

⁵⁰ To give an idea of the phenomenon in the second half of the seventeenth century, when the Esecutori decided to proceed by way of inquisition against blasphemers instead of relying on denunciations in 1684, 23 guilty parties were identified in just one day in the parish of San Geremia alone, five of whom were imprisoned immediately. They included the Vice Grand Captain, Antonio Coa, who had to submit himself to judgment by the Capi del Consiglio dei Dieci. However, it seems that the persecutory zeal of the Esecutori did not last long, perhaps also because of the estimated number of people who would have probably ended up in prison: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 116, Esecutori Contro la Bestemmia document dated 8 February 1683.

provides evidence and suspicion of heresy, must be dealt with by the office of the Inquisition regarding the part of evidence and suspicion, but the wickedness of the blasphemy is the responsibility of the secular court; and both must each do their part by conducting their trials; first of all the one which was the first to start it; and when both have issued sentences, both will be enforced ... This will be observed against those who damaged or threw stones at images of Christ our Lord or the saints ... The same will be done for public blasphemy pronounced in mockery, like singing false psalms or obscene impious litanies.⁵¹

This difference was taken for granted by those who were witnesses to blasphemy for professionally-linked reasons; it was almost inevitable that a *cavadenti* (tooth-puller) like Giovan Battista Cocciolo, interrogated in 1682, heard a reasonable amount of it. However, he must have seen it as completely justified, as he made a point of specifying to the Inquisitor that he had never heard it, 'except on the occasion of pulling out teeth'.⁵² It was instead gambling which led Count Mario Tolomeo Nerucci to blaspheme in such an elaborate and reasoned way that various accusations were made against him in Rome and Venice. He often gambled in Onorato d'Arbes's barbershop in San Salvador, which was also a meeting place for conversations in keeping with common practice. His nickname here was 'I'll tear it off you', given the frequency with which he exclaimed: 'Saint Peter, I'll tear that beard off you.' He used to say that 'if I had been around at the time of the Jews, I'd have done my bit against Christ. I want to go to Saxony to renegade Christ, even if I have been doing so for a while', sometimes adding that Christ had not really died on the cross, but had been hanged for theft.⁵³

Cases like Nerucci's really complicated matters, as the boundary between what was and was not heretical belonged to the field of intent and thus the conscience. Establishing it with precision implied a careful analysis of other

⁵¹ Paolo Sarpi, 'Sopra l'ufficio dell'Inquisizione', in *Scritti giurisdizionalistici*, G. Gambarin (ed.) (Bari: Laterza, 1958), pp. 119–212, at p. 125. There is a wide bibliography on blasphemy: see Francisca Loetz, *Dealings with God: From Blasphemers in Early Modern Zurich to a Cultural History of Religiousness* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009); David Nash, *Blasphemy in the Christian World: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For the Venetian case, see Derosas, 'Moralità e giustizia a Venezia nel '500–'600'; Elizabeth Horodowich, 'Civic Identity and the Control of Blasphemy in Sixteenth-Century Venice', *Past and Present*, 181 (2003): 3–33 and *Language and Statecraft in Early Modern Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁵² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 122, trial against Giuseppe Toscani, known as l'Orvietano, deposition by Giovan Battista Cocciolo on 5 March 1682.

⁵³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 124, trial against Mario Tolomeo Nerucci, spontaneous appearance by Giovan Battista Confalonieri on 5 July and deposition by Onorato d'Arbes on 29 November 1685.

factors such as the blasphemer's habits, an assessment of whether he led a 'bad life' or not, and most of all whether he usually supported blasphemy with detailed reasoning.⁵⁴ Except in cases where it took on an instrumental intimidatory value⁵⁵ and those in which its role as an element of syntax was unmistakable, blasphemy fairly often presented itself as the result of the progressive reduction of a concept to its most immediate terms. The stages of the process were not defined; when Marco Rutene, a *squerarolo* (gondola-maker), stated in 1675 that 'the Lord God was not legitimate, and that Mary Magdalene was his woman',⁵⁶ his comments perhaps stopped short of blasphemy, although they were not far off it. However, we can recognize the effects of a libertine tradition that had spread profane elements regarding the genealogy and life of Christ, around which different blasphemous formulae tended to accumulate.⁵⁷ We could perhaps also make similar considerations about Leonardo Bruni, a doctor from Naples who is documented as being in Venice at the end of the 1640s. He often pointed out to his companions 'that the Turks are saved more easily than the Christians', adding that 'if Christ was incarnated again within the body of the Virgin Mary and told him that his wife was a good woman, he would not believe it' and finishing by commenting that the inhabitants of heaven included

⁵⁴ There was a further complication: blasphemy could prove the faith of the blasphemer in some way. According to Casanova, the accusations that caused him to be imprisoned in the Piombi included 'that when I lost money at play, on which occasion all the faithful are wont to blaspheme, I was never heard to curse but the devil': Casanova, *History of My Life*, vol. 4, p. 191.

⁵⁵ In this respect, in around 1730 Giovanni Sagramoso, the Captain of the Boats of the Consiglio di Dieci, Giacomo 'Cospettazzo', a sailor, and Alvise Malipiero resorted to this 'either to make themselves feared by the inhabitants of the district ... or to demand the things that they respectively needed to buy at a better price from sellers and artists': ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 134, 22 January 1730.

⁵⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 117, trial against Caterina de Zuliani, session on 18 June 1675, undated handwritten note presented by Caterina.

⁵⁷ For example, relations between Christ and Mary Magdalene were – then as today – often a subject of focus. The result was attributing Christ with sexual desires and behaviour aimed at satisfying them, thereby lowering him to a completely human figure that was weak and fallible. Among the many examples, see the case of Giuseppe Rossi and Tobia Haselberg, even if in reality their reasoning started from the conclusion: 'Christ in human form was not the true son of God' but an impostor. In any case they also claimed 'that Christ put Lazarus to sleep with opium so that he could enjoy Mary Magdalene, his sister, with more freedom, and then resuscitated him with a herbal antidote': ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 126, trial against Tobia Haselberg, undated document, marked A, presented by Domenico Paterno in the session on 22 May 1692, c. 2v.

‘holy pimps and holy whores’.⁵⁸ Heterodox propositions could therefore take shape in an extremely varied way and be characterized as blasphemy or not. To put it another way, those who blasphemed continuously in a self-satisfied way might have done it out of habit or purely because it was a widely used term, but sometimes at least their behaviour expressed a form of rebellion intended to be public with an unequivocal attitude towards the divinities. This rebellion then sometimes continued in a more structured way in the field of demonic invocation, an extreme rejection of the divine figure and the highest form of acceptance of his opposite number. The juxtaposition of topics and stances openly based on unbelief was often accompanied by interests, readings and practices based on magic that involved recourse to the evocation of demons and complete acceptance of their authority.⁵⁹

Besides the oral dimension, which, although diverse, constituted the main channel of expression, heterodox convictions could also be translated into actions and gestures. It would certainly be hard to claim that those who blasphemed, ‘roasted Christs, and burnt images’ or abused crucifixes in various ways were expressing theoretically founded unbelief.⁶⁰ It is possible, however, that they were showing a degree of adhesion to ideas and suggestions that they had made their own and did not have the tools to express themselves differently or perhaps not even to think in an alternative way. In the 1670s Girolama Bonotti could not separate thought from action, thereby earning a reputation as a ‘wicked woman’ who ‘did not want to hear or say prayers, and never went either to church or to confess’. When she became a widow and moved into a room decorated with images of saints, as was the habit, she flew into a rage: ‘what kind of saints, what kind of vanities did you put in my bedroom? Let God stay on his side, and I will be on mine’. She took them and ripped them up, in keeping with the vision of the world in which ‘God does not govern us, but everything happens by chance, and

⁵⁸ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 103, Giustina Sugolota file, undated anonymous letter of denunciation against Leonardo Bruni. I have transcribed the passage unaltered as I considered the writer’s usage of words to be important.

⁵⁹ On the question of links between demonolatry and scepticism in the Republic of Venice, see Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli*, pp. 131–45.

⁶⁰ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 110, trial against Fra’ Cherubino from Venice and Fra’ Giovan Battista from Este, deposition by Fra’ Girolamo from Piove di Sacco at the Sant’Uffizio of Padua on 19 August 1663, c. 25v. Moreover, the association of blasphemy and contempt of images was quite common. See, for example, the case of Alessandro Monti, an innkeeper from Breganze, tried in 1666 and 1676 by the Inquisition courts of Vicenza and Padua ‘ob blasphemias hereticales, et percussionem sacrarum imaginum’: ACDF, S.O., *Decreta 1676*, c. 198r, 14 September 1676.

once you have died, everything has died'.⁶¹ The expression of these sentiments, for lack of an adequate vocabulary, was entrusted to actions, especially violent ones carried out against images. In 1683 Laura Tagliapietra insulted crucifixes and threw them around, in addition to cutting up images of the Madonna with scissors.⁶² All this was accompanied by basic but clear verbal testimonies of the reasons that had induced her to do it: 'I don't believe in God ... There is no God, I don't believe in the existence of God. There is only the Devil.'⁶³ These iconoclastic attitudes were fairly widespread and were often the theatrical depiction of a general rejection of norms and authorities, frequently combined with rejection of the accepted divinity and adhesion to the cult of demons.

Unbelief was therefore also a question of practical translations of thoughts and theories transformed into concrete actions. I do not know whether the person who defaced an image of the Madonna in Vicenza on the night between 21 and 22 January 1695 was a staunch unbeliever, a playful jester or simply someone dissatisfied with the artistic rendering of the painting. However, the addition of 'many signs of black grease on the face in the form of moustache, beard and other features' denoted at the very least a somewhat free relationship with the idea of what was sacred.⁶⁴ An equally unequivocal attitude was shown by the anonymous person in Conegliano who stabbed images of Christ and St Anthony in 1736, commenting on his act with a stream of blasphemy.⁶⁵ There were numerous similar episodes of 'contempt of holy images' especially in cities and country areas on the mainland, although they were generally isolated acts of rage and unmediated expressions of rebellion mostly aimed at anti-clerical targets, and issues obviously tended to overlap. In the case of Lorenzo Pillon from Belluno, for example, the anti-clerical dimension seems to have been more pronounced than the heretical or unbelieving dimension. Although an allowance should be made for the rhetoric of anonymous denunciations, there was probably an element of truth about his behaviour if the denouncer was able to identify 137 witnesses. He was accused because one evening he had walked the streets of Belluno singing litanies backwards and blaspheming against God and the Virgin, adding an 'ora pro nobis' at the end of each. On the same evening

⁶¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 121, trial against Girolama Bonotti, written denunciation presented on 22 August 1679 by Giovanni Radicio.

⁶² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 122, Angela Soave file, trial against Laura Tagliapietra, written denunciation presented by Giovan Battista Dolobella on 29 July 1683.

⁶³ Ibid., deposition by Maddalena Bertazzo on 16 March 1684.

⁶⁴ ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 122, 19 December 1696.

⁶⁵ Accused of being the author of the act, a certain Giovan Battista Bianchi stayed in prison for about nine months before being exonerated: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 140, 30 July 1736 and b. 141, 5 April 1737.

that he sang litanies backwards, he attached a piece of meat to the bellrope of the Capuchin monastery, 'in this way the dogs rang the bell at the same time, and when the poor monks came to see who was ringing the bell, Pilone mocked and made fun of them, laughing, joking and blaspheming the name of God, unleashing a stream of improper language, abuse and rudeness'. Furthermore, one Friday he sat down and ate meat and made every effort to persuade his companions to do the same. As they refused, 'he said these words, laughing and making fun of the Blessed Virgin and saints: Madonneta, Madonneta, san Carlo, san Carlo'.⁶⁶

However, there was no lack of cases in which the violation of the image clearly constituted a concrete continuation of more structured heterodox ideas. For example, in 1740 Gerardo Mercandelli from Brescia, a notorious blasphemer, was accused of breaking the legs of a wooden crucifix that he had taken into an *osteria*. Mercandelli offered it something to drink and lost his temper as a result of its refusal signified by silence. In this case, however, the 'contempt' was the manifestation of a sufficiently deep-seated belief, given that he had denied the existence of God on several occasions.⁶⁷ Less information is available regarding the many other episodes witnessed in different places on the mainland; for example, little was known about the chalice filled with 'filth' in Cavarzere Cathedral in 1690.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Antonio Bregiolin from Arzignano did not have much chance of escaping scot-free when at the end of 1715 he went to the church of the Capuchin convent with a friend and covered:

the sign of the holy cross with human excrement ... and the image of Saint Felice attached to a painting ... running through the streets with highly insolent cries, hurling insults in their houses with blasphemy and ill-treating some people from the neighbourhood using indecent expressions for no reason, but driven solely by his bad and resentful spirit.⁶⁹

It is true, however, that in general the history of unbelief cannot be reduced to a history of abstractions, arguments and ideas.⁷⁰ The language that non-believers

⁶⁶ ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 84, anonymous denunciation read in the Council on 16 January 1653. After five votes it was decided not to proceed.

⁶⁷ ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 53, letter from Alvise Mocenigo, III Captain of Brescia of 27 January, written document by councillors Fra' Paolo Celotti and Trifone Wrachien of 9 March and *parte* of 19 March 1740.

⁶⁸ ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 119, 20 June 1690.

⁶⁹ ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 132, 10 January 1716.

⁷⁰ David Wootton, 'New Histories of Atheism', in Michael Hunter and David Wootton (eds), *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992),

– or those who did not fully believe, or did not believe only at a given moment – could use to communicate their feelings was not merely verbal but belonged to a huge range of opportunities for communication. Gestures, attitudes, clothing, tastes and anything else could be used to express or underline personal thoughts. Nonetheless, it is difficult to establish definite connections either way between the behaviour of a person and his most closely-held convictions; we cannot say for sure that those who ate fat on days when it was forbidden or went around naked near monasteries – just to quote two well-documented cases – were staunch unbelievers; they might simply have been drunk. In the same way, those who blasphemed constantly in a reasoned way might just have become accustomed to using such a form of expression without being interested in using it to express a deep-rooted heartfelt disapproval of orthodoxy. Equally, it is certainly not given that unbelief led to a wicked life devoid of all moral restraints. It is true that for many the rejection of normal ethical codes sometimes represented a theoretical justification of their behaviour, but this was not always necessarily the case.

Nevertheless, the issue of the way that dissent was expressed, sometimes through violent manifestations, has a certain importance in the spread of heterodoxy, irrespective of whether we can fully understand the intentions of the responsible parties. In the first place the fact that an individual used certain language – verbal or otherwise – and a specific word provides information on the phenomenon itself, given that forms of expression necessarily had to reiterate shared content commonly identified as deviant. Secondly, beyond considerations of how something could be pronounced or manifest itself and with which intentions, we are left with the question of who listened to, understood and interpreted these formulae on the basis of personal categories. Therefore, a common repertoire of words and gestures came into being, which was not necessarily the case for thoughts.

Belief, unbelief and positions in between

Did ‘dedicating oneself to the devil’ and completely ignoring Christian teachings necessarily involve no longer believing in God? Did blaspheming against His name and acting as if He did not exist imply that one really believed He was effectively absent? The fact that some people denied the existence of God on the basis of the inadequacy of His attributes compared to scriptural images or personal expectations clearly does not reveal whether the denial continued by

pp. 14–15. Some useful considerations can be found in David L. D’Avray, *Rationalities in History: A Weberian Essay in Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 89.

proposing a better candidate or better exponents, or whether it limited itself to absolute denial. In this sense the problem of defining unbelief and atheism, and consequently the applicability of these concepts to the modern age, was and still is at the centre of a wide-ranging debate, just like the closely related issue of the historical evolution of such phenomena. In brief, according to the traditional interpretation of this process, the Renaissance handed down secular knowledge in some way free of the influence of the Church. In turn, by favouring the individual interpretation of holy texts, the Reformation opened the way to free thinking. The scientific revolution then picked up the Renaissance terms again and made daring use of them in light of the opportunities for thought opened up by the Reformation. From here it was a short step to the Enlightenment and then to atheism.

It is clear that such a rigidly established causal chain inevitably only leads to a partial vision, the result of an evolutionist perspective that tends to undervalue certain factors. For example, in places where the Reformation was implemented, it tended to establish new orthodoxies in place of the previous ones, with the consequent creation of new systems of control on freedom of thought.⁷¹ It also tends to consider some cultural phenomena simply as survivors from previous periods instead of analysing their role in the social context in which they occurred.⁷² Finally, it overlooks 'the fact that the idea that history moves in a certain direction and only in that direction, instead of moving simultaneously in different directions, which might even be contradictory, is simply our *a priori* judgement'.⁷³

In 1942, with the publication of *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVI^e siècle. La religion de Rabelais*, Lucien Febvre set out the problem in new terms, in an attempt to answer the question of whether or not it was possible to be atheist in the sixteenth century. He concluded that there were simply no opportunities for atheism or unbelief at the time, because there was a lack of mental tools through which an individual could define or see himself as an atheist. He felt that the fact that terms existed to define certain phenomena was inconclusive, as these words were applied continually to a wide variety of different situations with the emphasis always on controversy, mainly to attack those who did not fully conform to orthodoxy. The tools that made it possible to form the concept of

⁷¹ Wootton, pp. 15–16.

⁷² There are a few considerations on this type of approach to the study of social phenomena in Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 2ff.

⁷³ Giorgio Spini, *Alcuni appunti sui libertini italiani*, in Sergio Bertelli (ed.), *Il libertinismo in Europa* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1980), pp. 117–24, at p. 118.

atheism in the modern sense of the word were not made available until Descartes' materialism well into the seventeenth century.⁷⁴

Even if we accept Febvre's arguments as valid along with his proposed chronological scheme, we still need to identify the moment at which atheism could start to be regarded as a widespread phenomenon, given that it is reasonable to expect a certain interval between the publication of Descartes' theories and their reception and translation into widespread ideas. According to some, this path was not a clearly drawn one, and the figure of the atheist emerged gradually, first of all as a controversy-driven need for theologians.⁷⁵ As nobody could rationally affirm that God did not exist, theological Aristotelianism needed to create controversial points of reference in view of the preparation of arguments to counter possible stances along these lines. It was therefore theologians who proposed a series of arguments against the existence of God until they created a world of 'atheists without atheism' and of 'atheism without atheists', with people who lacked the conceptual tools to reach atheism and concepts which were not embodied in real people. The matter was consequently played out entirely within the world of theologians. The atheist was a product of their minds and slowly came to life like a kind of Golem to turn against its creator.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Paris: Editions Albin Michel, 1942. The English translation is *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985). Among the many critical stances adopted towards Febvre's work, see David Wootton, 'Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Unbelief in the Early Modern Period', *Journal of Modern History*, 4 (1988): 695–730, which analyses Rabelais in light of Febvre's other texts on unbelief.

⁷⁵ In fact, at least some of those who attacked atheism tended to deny the possibility that it was really widespread and embodied in real people. As David Hume commented ironically, 'There is not a greater number of philosophical reasonings, displayed upon any subject, than those, which prove the existence of a Deity, and refute the fallacies of Atheists; and yet the most religious philosophers still dispute whether any man can be so blinded as to be a speculative atheist. How shall we reconcile these contradictions? The knights errant, who wandered about to clear the world of dragons and giants, never entertained the least doubt with regard to the existence of these monsters.': Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, p. 102.

⁷⁶ The main exponent of this interpretative line is probably Kors, *Atheism in France*: 'Atheism without Atheists' and 'Atheists without Atheism' are the titles of Chapters 1 and 3. Among the many reviews which criticized this reading, see those by Dale K. van Kley, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 1 (1992): 138–42 and Alice Stroup, *Journal of Modern History*, 1 (1994): 149–50. Although starting from different assumptions, similar conclusions are also reached by Michael J. Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). Moreover, before Kors, Kristeller developed the idea that non-atheist writers contributed to the formation of atheist readers: Paul O. Kristeller, 'The Myth of Renaissance Atheism and the French Tradition of Free Thought', *Journal of the History*

It is undeniable that many of the elements used by theologians contributed to the formation of a philosophically grounded form of unbelief and that Catholic apologists often became involuntary promoters of the doctrines they were fighting against.⁷⁷ The debate between the Cartesians and the Aristotelians was conducted before the many readers of *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* and made a decisive contribution to the circulation of arguments against the existence of God and the holiest, most fundamental dogma. These arguments were then taken up again and incorporated into clandestine manuscripts, thereby entering a genuinely irreligious context.⁷⁸ In the preface to the first issue of *Nouvelles* in March 1684, Bayle himself noted that in ‘pays d’Inquisition ... on ne souffre pas même que les controversistes catholiques soient exposés en vente, tant on a peur des objections qui paraissent dans leurs ouvrages’.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the main risk of offering a form of athesim which is contained within orthodoxy and dependent on it is that it might transform what at the time must have seemed like a real and dreaded enemy into pure fancy, without taking into consideration the extensive clandestine output with all the characteristics of atheism.⁸⁰

The question is clearly a complex one, as it is linked in the first place to different concepts and definitions of ‘atheist’, a term often used in the early modern age as a rhetorical instrument for expressing the utmost disapproval. Atelastrio, one of the two characters in Filippo Maria Bonini’s conversation, *L’ateista convinto dalle sole ragioni*, was an ‘atheist’ because he had learnt about philosophers such as Descartes and Gassendi during a trip to France and admired them.⁸¹ There was a short and sometimes non-existent step between the

of *Philosophy*, 6 (1968): 233–43. Similar considerations were also expressed about the term ‘libertinism’, sustaining that the libertine was no more than the product of an apologetic invention – Father François Garasse played a predominant role in this – which grafted expressions generically associated with Vanini and his predecessors on to biblical elements: Louise Godard de Donville, ‘L’invention du “libertin” en 1623 et ses conséquences sur la lecture des textes’, *Libertinage et philosophie au XVII^e siècle*, 6 (2002): 7–18.

⁷⁷ Of interest with regard to this topic is Isabelle Dubail, ‘Le bel esprit entre ostentation et dissimulation dans la Doctrine curieuse du Père Garasse’, *Libertinage et philosophie au XVII^e siècle*, 5 (2001): 23–46.

⁷⁸ Kors, *Atheism in France*.

⁷⁹ Pierre Bayle, ‘Preface’, *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, March 1684 (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints edition, 1966), vol. 1, p. 7.

⁸⁰ On this point, see Gianni Paganini, ‘Legislatores et impostores. Le Theophrastus redivivus et la thèse de l’imposture des religions à la moitié du XVII^e siècle’, in Jean-Pierre Cavaillé and Didier Foucault (eds), *Sources antiques de l’irréligion moderne: le relais italien* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2001), pp. 181–218.

⁸¹ Filippo M. Bonini, *L’ateista convinto dalle sole ragioni* (Venice: Nicolò Pezzana, 1665).

definitions of ‘atheist’ and ‘Lutheran’. This was both because one could believe by turns and because those who had the professional task of defining heterodox phenomena did not demonstrate very clear ideas. There was certainly no more clarity between believers and unbelievers either. The concept of unbelief found a significant formulation in the words of an anonymous denouncer in 1654, who reassured the Inquisitors of State by affirming that he was fully conscious of the fact that if he had not told the truth, he would have been ‘an infidel, worse than a Turk, an atheist or a devil’. These were probably the worst things that he could think of and I do not think that he perceived a clear difference between the four.⁸² Instead, another denouncer, the Marquis of Pentedattilo, showed a certain awareness of the difference in 1687. In an attempt to exaggerate the terrible qualities of Bernardino Abenavoli, he adopted rising invective and in the end claimed that he was ‘worse than a heretic, or rather an atheist’.⁸³ There were also those who raised the problem of whether or not it was possible to distinguish completely between an articulate coherent denial of the existence of God and a sort of agnosticism or ‘sceptical atheism’, aimed not so much at rationally denying God as at asserting that no evidence was able to demonstrate that He exists. Therefore, if it was impossible to know God, many felt that it was legitimate to act as if He did not exist.⁸⁴

Beyond the distinctions and groupings – often extremely limited – adopted to try to reduce the phenomenon, I feel that it is sensible to admit two things. First, even before 1650 and the spread of the Cartesian separation of body and soul, there were people who believed it was possible that God did not exist, in ways and means that were perhaps highly personal.⁸⁵ Secondly, it is difficult to fit the manifestations and forms assumed by atheism, at least in the seventeenth century and the first decades of the eighteenth century, into the current rigid

⁸² ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 638, anonymous written document of 12 November 1654.

⁸³ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 714, letter from the Marquis of Pentedattilo to the Inquisitors of State on 20 June 1687.

⁸⁴ The distinction between metaphysical and sceptical atheism was offered by Winfried Schröder, ‘From Doubt to Rejection: The Impact of Ancient Pyrrhonism on the Emergence of Early Modern Atheism’, in Gianni Paganini, Miguel Benitez and James Dybikowski (eds), *Scepticisme, clandestinité et libre pensée* (Paris: Champion, 2002), pp. 67–77; and Winfried Schröder *Ursprünge des Atheismus. Untersuchungen zur Metaphysik-und Religionskritik des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1998).

⁸⁵ When Giovan Battista de Pizzoni asked him ‘what atheism meant’, Tommaso Campanella answered ‘that it meant that there was no God, and when I asked him if he really believed it, he answered that he did, but that the truth cannot be told’: Luigi Amabile, *Fra Tommaso Campanella. La sua congiura, i suoi processi e la sua pazzia* (3 vols, Naples: Morano, 1882), vol. 3, p. 314, which includes Pizzoni’s testimony on 22 August 1600.

definitions. In conclusion, I can fully accept the idea that the term ‘atheist’ – in its many different forms – acted to designate not only a contentious subject built up theoretically by controversialists but also real individuals, given that it is difficult to deny the presence of people or writings that affirmed the non-existence of a divinity or proposed doctrines that led to the significant observation that there was no God. However, it is clear that the religious authorities at least had expertise and were equipped with mental tools that made them able to distinguish fairly easily between athesim and heresy in theoretical terms.⁸⁶

The most recent historiography has underlined the presence of medieval atheism⁸⁷ and it is fairly obvious that the theoretical opportunity to deny God is implicit in the very statement that He exists;⁸⁸ generating different forms which may lead to this denial in different contexts.⁸⁹ I also feel that it is generally difficult to establish a concept clearly to define the rejection of such a vague, ambiguous, contradictory category linked to personal experience as ‘belief’, given that a close definition of atheism – or even unbelief – in a given context and time presupposes an equally precise definition of what ‘belief’ represented at the same time, place and environment. In other words, it would be necessary to fit the whole repertoire of individual emotions, thoughts and states of mind into

⁸⁶ In 1535, for example, the Synod of Strasbourg defined atheists as those who ‘croient que cette vie n’est suivie d’aucune vie éternelle, ou encore qu’il n’y a ni jugement, ni damnation après cette vie-ci et ni diable, ni enfer’. They were also ‘tous ceux qui prétendent que Dieu ne se soucie pas de nos actes, et qui nient toute autre vie après celle-ci’: Jean Wirth, ‘Libertins et épicuriens: aspects de l’irréligion en France au XVI^e siècle’, in *Sainte Anne est une sorcière et autres essais* (Geneva: Droz, 2003), pp. 25–67, at pp. 59–60.

⁸⁷ See, for example, Didier Ottaviani, ‘L’intellectuel laïque: de Siger de Brabant à Pietro d’Abano’, in Emmanuel Chubilleau and Éric Puisais (eds), *Les athéismes philosophiques* (Paris: Kimé, 2001), pp. 13–25; Graziella Federici Vescovini, ‘Il problema dell’ateismo di Biagio Pelacani da Parma, Doctor Diabolicus’, in Friedrich Niewöner and Olaf Pluta (eds), *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance* (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz Verlag, 1999), pp. 193–210; Wirth, ‘Libertins et épicuriens’, p. 22; John Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London: Hodder Education, 2005); Paolo Golinelli, *Il Medioevo degli increduli. Miscredenti, beffatori, anticlericali* (Milan: Mursia, 2009).

⁸⁸ See the considerations by Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, ‘Pour en finir avec l’histoire des mentalité’, *Critique*, 695 (2005): 285–300, review of Jean Wirth, *Sainte Anne est une sorcière*.

⁸⁹ Indeed, the problem is not only chronological but also a question of social circles. To this end Fritz Mauthner observed that when a religious belief is rejected, the forms assumed by the rejection reflect the rejected religion. Therefore, pagan atheism is not the same as Christian atheism or Muslim atheism: Fritz Mauthner, *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendland* (4 vols, Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 1989), vol. 1, p. 10. On this aspect, see also Sarah Stroumsa, ‘The Religion of the Freethinkers of Medieval Islam’, in Niewöner and Pluta (eds), *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, pp. 45–58.

a model that presupposed constant answers to needs and questions perceived in a constantly differing and contrasting way by each individual.⁹⁰

Any attempt to apply the category of atheism to the ways of unbelief must therefore contend with this irreparably individual dimension; it is perhaps just as difficult to find a pure distilled form of incredulity regarding a divine being as it is to identify a way of believing that corresponds to an ideal type of belief, as both were linked to biographical and intellectual paths in which rejection became the norm. Therefore, while the events discussed here sometimes featured clear rejection of any truth that transcends the earthly sphere – although these were not always coherent or definitive positions – on other occasions it seems that the denial of the divinity was precisely that which was known and referred to.⁹¹ In other words, many did not pose the problem of contesting the existence of a supreme being, but rather the existence of the god that the members of their religious confession believed in. Therefore, if it is possible to draw conclusions about what is called ‘philosophical atheism’, as far as the less elaborate manifestations of unbelief are concerned, I think that it is prudent to accept a broad definition of atheism and accept that there were people who were not only seen as atheists but who believed that they were and were happy to be so, expressing themselves in a steadfast and sometimes vociferous way.⁹² After all, it was this broad interpretation that found precise answers to the following question: who were the masters of Italian unbelief? The answer offered by

⁹⁰ The starting point is obviously Ludwig Wittgenstein, in particular *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, Religious Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966) and *Remarks on Frazer’s ‘Golden Bough’* (Retford: Brynmill Press, 1983). Also important along the same lines is Rodney Needham, *Belief, Language, and Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972). See also Loetz and Michael F. Graham, *The Blasphemies of Thomas Aikenhead: Boundaries of Belief on the Eve of the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

⁹¹ Vittorio Frajese, ‘Ateismo’, in *DSI*, vol. 1, pp. 114–18.

⁹² It has been written that the term ‘atheism ... seems to us to best encapsulate the articulate assault on Christianity and, often, on religion in general that is to be found in this period’, and so it is not possible to study exclusively people who were openly atheist in the sense of the present-day meaning: Michael Hunter and David Wootton, ‘Introduction’, in Michael Hunter and David Wootton (eds), *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 2. Instead, Silvia Berti offered a distinction not so much between ‘piety and impiety (including all forms of unbelief, from irreverence to atheism)’, as between ‘mere unbelief and atheism. The world of unbelief and blasphemy lives on within the world of faith. He who asserts, however courageously, that he does not believe in God, in the end does nothing more than say, “I *believe* that God does not exist”’. In order to break away definitively from the world of faith, a philosophical grounding in atheism was required, combined with a new form of biblical criticism. This break was made by Spinoza: Berti, ‘At the Roots of Unbelief’, p. 562, italics in text.

those observing the phenomenon in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries made use of a set of cultural traditions which were difficult to assimilate, and the resulting overview was hazy and confused. The points of reference of the libertines, unbelievers and 'atheists' were variously identified as Aretino, Poggio Bracciolini, Clement VII, Alexander VI, Pomponazzi, Cremonini, Vanini and Galileo, or Ermolao Barbaro, Ficino, Poliziano, Porzio, Berigardo and Cardano.⁹³ Others could also be found if necessary without any great difficulty. Widely varying archetypes were used because the situation came across as confused and complex.

Explicit denial of the existence of God could also be reached in degrees – the idea of progression from heresy to athesim was widespread – and assume different forms.⁹⁴ In short, a fairly elastic concept was used to identify both those who did not believe in the existence of God and those who did not believe in something which made existence irrelevant, like the immortality of the soul.⁹⁵ Indeed, the fact that some contested it was often seen as the first step towards structured rejection of the very existence of the divinity. As Giovan Francesco Priuli, a Somascan, noted when reporting Troilo Lanzetta, a doctor, to the Sant'Uffizio in 1661, the latter was 'vehemently suspicious' with regard to faith and in particular 'regarding the immortality of the soul, and consequently every other mystery of the Catholic faith'.⁹⁶ Don Carlo Filiotti was also 'known as an atheist, because he had been repeatedly heard speaking about the mortality of the rational soul, held extravagant principles, that the soul was mortal'.⁹⁷ In this sense the rejection of single elements whose denial constitutes a corollary of atheism as it is currently conceived – the immortality of the soul, the afterlife, or the authority of a sacred text and so on – was immediately associated with

⁹³ The two lists are in Johannes Micraelius, *Historia ecclesiastica* (Magdeburg, 1699), pp. 887–8; Thomas Philipps, *Dissertatio historico-philosophico de atheismo* (London, 1716), pp. 75–96.

⁹⁴ 'Even in religious matters little sparkles of superstition, of an almost imperceptible alteration, turn into great fires, because as time passes superstitions change into heresies, heresies transform into unbelief, and the latter becomes atheism': Traiano Boccalini, *Commentari sopra Cornelio Tacito*. I am quoting from a manuscript preserved in ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Miscellanea codici*, n. 104, cc. 965v–966r.

⁹⁵ Wootton, *New Histories of Atheism*, pp. 25–6. There is reference to the implicit connection between atheism and denial of the immortality of the soul in seventeenth-century theological output and polemics in Tullio Gregory, *Theophrastus redivivus. Erudizione e ateismo nel Seicento* (Naples: Morano, 1979), pp. 107–8.

⁹⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 110, Fra' Fontanarosa file, trial against Troilo Lanzetta, written document by Fra' Giovan Francesco Priuli presented on 28 October 1661.

⁹⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 107, trial against Don Carlo Filiotti, deposition by Don Bartolomeo Franzino on 19 December 1652, cc. 17r–v.

atheism, just like any denial of a 'divine economy of rewards and punishments, in heaven and hell'.⁹⁸ With regard to assertions by a peasant from Spresiano, under accusation at the Sant'Uffizio of Treviso, that religion and the Gospels had been invented 'by priests and prelates', that hell did not exist and that the soul was mortal, Fra' Giovanni Maria Bertolli, the Consultore in Iure, wrote in 1703 that it was 'a heresy of those atheists who are currently in Amsterdam, who have it that souls die with bodies, that hell is a flight of fancy, and heaven an illusion'.⁹⁹ A few years later he was echoed in this by his Servite colleague Fra' Celso Viccioni, who stated that 'although he says he is a believer ..., he does not really believe either in God or in his godly son Jesus Christ'. Whoever sullied himself with such an opinion was either 'an out-and-out madman or a wicked atheist'.¹⁰⁰

Beyond the philosophical and theological debate it was perhaps not so much the existence or otherwise of a superior being that interested the dedicated non-professional polemicists who filled meeting places in Venice as the degree to which this being was involved in human affairs. In 1647 Faustina Cortesia, who we have encountered before, fell ill and commended herself to God, the Virgin and the saints. It seems that she also did this with a certain degree of conviction. Nevertheless, in the end 'not having been satisfied, I said that ... there is no God, no most holy Virgin, no saints, no such things, otherwise it would be impossible not to be satisfied'.¹⁰¹ The first stage of a more or less structured form of atheism was often the recognition of the absolute extraneousness of God with regard to what happened on earth. In 1655 Giovan Francesco Vantaggi was convinced 'that God does not look after the low things', reiterating and acting as a platform for considerations by a gold-beater colleague on the matter. As proof of divine detachment, Carlo Vanali put forward an extremely *laissez-faire* argument: 'if one man kills another, it does not happen because God has arranged it, but only because of the prowess of the man who kills, just as if one merchant negotiates better than another, it happens because he is better at such dealings'.¹⁰² In the 1670s Teodoro Stricher also thought that providence definitely did not exist, given that 'things in this world happen at random'. Divine disinterest in human

⁹⁸ David Wootton, 'Unbelief in Early Modern Europe', *History Workshop Journal*, 20 (1985): 82–100, at p. 86.

⁹⁹ ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 18, 12 June 1703.

¹⁰⁰ ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 22, 14 December 1710.

¹⁰¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 103, Salvatore Caravaggio file, trial against Faustina Cortesia, spontaneous appearance by Faustina on 28 April 1647.

¹⁰² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 108, Carlo Vanali file, trial against Carlo Vanali, spontaneous appearance by Giovan Francesco Vantaggi on 19 March 1655.

affairs went so far that ‘God does not even know that we are in this world’.¹⁰³ Going one step further, Grando de Grandi from Vicenza stated in 1692 ‘that he doesn’t know what God is, and that he hasn’t seen Him except in fancy dress on Good Friday’. He saw priests, who obviously affirmed the contrary, as ignorant, as they had not studied like him and did not realize that ‘we are like lots of lost kittens’.¹⁰⁴ These were therefore positions that at different times ranged from the simple expression of doubts regarding the immortality of the soul to a fairly structured form of materialism like the one proposed by Giuseppe Rossi in 1692 that denied the existence of God, the Virgin and the saints. Christ had obviously been an imposter, ‘a real genius who went around persuading those poor ignorant people’. He felt that there was ‘no heaven, or demons in hell, and ... the world has always been here and naturally always will be, and ... when we die the soul dies together with the body’.¹⁰⁵ In 1697 Dario Doria, a goldsmith, also denied the existence of God in unequivocal terms: ‘what is this God, I don’t believe in God and I’m not afraid of God. There is no God’. He saw the soul in the same way as God: ‘when I die, everything dies, there is nothing else, like an animal’.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 117, trial against Teodoro Stricher, spontaneous appearance by Francesco Priuli on 10 April 1674.

¹⁰⁴ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 127, trial against Grando de Grandi, spontaneous appearance by Antonio della Chiesa and Zanetta de Grandi on 3 September 1692. The trial gave rise to a diplomatic clash between the Venetian government and Rome. It had started in Vicenza, but the obstacles placed by the Rectors of the city led it to be transferred to Venice. Although the accusations focused on de Grandi’s statements of unbelief, there was also a charge regarding possession of a placenta for the purposes of magic. As this matter was connected to superstition, it was relevant to the secular court, giving rise to a conflict of jurisdiction. Also, as the accusations included some offences committed in Venice, the solution was the transfer of the main court papers: ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 10, 29 November and 20 December 1692. See also the written document by Consultori in Iure Giovanni Maria Bertolli and Fra’ Celso Viccioni of 17 December. Also f. 11, 25 February, 7 May and 11 July 1693. For the Roman perspective and reactions of the Congregation, see ACDF, S.O., *Decreta 1692*, c. 344v, 14 October 1692 and c. 424v, 31 December 1692. De Grandi was released on 12 January 1694, although the trial remained open: ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 127, trial against Grando de Grandi, 12 January 1694.

¹⁰⁵ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 126, trial against Tobia Haselberg, undated written document, marked A, presented by Domenico Paterno during session on 22 May 1692, c. 2v. With regard to demons, ‘the rebellion of angels is an invention and ... was not true’.

¹⁰⁶ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 129, Doctor Neri file, trial against Dario Doria, spontaneous appearance by Don Francesco Pedrini on 12 November 1697.

Legacies

It is clear that the heterodox themes and propositions which circulated during the seventeenth century and part of the eighteenth century could be seen as some kind of legacy of both the reformist drive of the previous century and Renaissance irreligious trends. Ideas such as the mortality of the soul, the purely earthly destiny of man, the eternity of the world or the falseness of religious dogma and its use for self-serving purposes all belonged to a long-running tradition that – starting from Aristotelian doctrines, or more precisely from Averroist Aristotelianism with its suggestion of integral rationalism – had been part of European thought since at least the thirteenth century.¹⁰⁷ They were then developed during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by groups linked to Paduan Aristotelianism, from whence they spread out all over Europe.¹⁰⁸ In many respects the ‘connection between the extreme results of Renaissance naturalism and Machiavellian theses’ formed the basis of the radical irreligiousness of a text such as the *Theophrastus redivivus*.¹⁰⁹ Widespread radical Antitrinitarianism, whereby Christ was not seen as the natural son of Mary and Joseph, was certainly still preserved in the enduring Anabaptist climate in Italy and the Serenissima in particular, which constituted proof of the special nature of the readings of Reformation doctrines that were made on the peninsula. The theme of the ‘sleep of souls’, according to which impious souls would die along with their bodies, while the chosen ones would wait for the Day of Judgment in peaceful sleep, was a common feature of Anabaptism, even in the special way in which it was received in Venice. Other features were the denial of the existence of supernatural beings such as angels or demons and the rejection of the divine origin of the human soul. All these elements were being circulated independently by the end of the following century.¹¹⁰ Therefore, Anabaptist theological radicalism, which

¹⁰⁷ See the classic work by Ernest Renan, *Averroès et l'Averroïsme* (Paris: Auguste Durand, 1852), in particular on the use of such doctrines by rationalist circles at the University of Paris (pp. 269–79 and 292–300). On the relationship between Aristotelianism and libertine trends of thought, see Tullio Gregory, ‘Aristotelismo e libertinismo’, *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, 2 (1982): 153–67.

¹⁰⁸ For example, on the spread of Paduan ideas in sixteenth-century France, see Henri Busson, *Les sources et le développement du rationalisme dans la littérature française de la Renaissance (1553–1601)* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1922). See also Charles B. Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

¹⁰⁹ Gregory, *Theophrastus redivivus*, p. 113.

¹¹⁰ Davidson, ‘Unbelief and Atheism’, pp. 65–7. ‘Insistence on the simplicity of the word of God, rejection of sacred images, ceremonies, and the sacraments, the denial of Christ’s divinity, the adherence to a practical religion based on works, the polemic with the stamp of pauperism against ecclesiastical “pomp”, the exaltation of tolerance, are all elements

had been expressed at the Venetian ‘council’ in 1550, constituted the ‘premise for the successive anti-trinitarian developments of Italian heretical emigration, destined to mature in the seventeenth-century Socinian tradition until the crisis of the European conscience and the Age of Enlightenment’.¹¹¹ Equally, themes such as the denial of papal authority and Church hierarchy, purgatory, the effectiveness of the mediation of saints and the Madonna, good deeds, or all rites and sacraments and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist could all form part of the mental accoutrements of some supporters of the Reformation or the sizeable number of Venetian disciples of Giorgio Siculo, who might have had the opportunity to read the *Libro maggiore* or *Libro grande*, now lost but fervently persecuted by Inquisitors in the past. Among other things, the same line of thought could also include the conviction that the soul was mortal, ‘created ... by men together with the body’.¹¹²

The Reformation played a determining role in this interweaving of influences and suggestions, although it is difficult to define how. Moreover, the whole Italian Reformation was characterized by the special way in which the Lutheran message was received and interpreted, interweaving to varying degrees of complexity with specific cultural and religious traditions that could be found in Italian states, especially in urban environments. Anticlericalism, Millenarism, Renaissance Platonism, Evangelism and Pomponazzi’s Paduan Aristotelianism interpreted Reformation principles and transformed them to some extent. Opportunity for change was thus an innate feature of the structure of the Italian Reformist movement.¹¹³

John Martin has identified three main lines of dissent in sixteenth-century Venice. He sees the most prominent as Evangelism, which shared many Protestant affirmations such as the theory of salvation through faith alone, although not all evangelicals felt the need to break away from the Church of Rome. The Evangelical groups then gave rise to another two trends characterized by an underlying radicalism which led them to assume extreme positions. First,

that can be traced to the religious radicalism of the Anabaptists’: Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, p. 18.

¹¹¹ Massimo Firpo, *Riforma protestante ed eresie nell’Italia del Cinquecento* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1993), p. 148.

¹¹² On Giorgio Siculo, see Adriano Prosperi, *L’eresia del Libro Grande. Storia di Giorgio Siculo e della sua setta* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2000).

¹¹³ There is a huge range of literature on the Reformation in Italy. Here I shall just refer to the list in John Tedeschi and James M. Lattis, *The Italian Reformation of the Sixteenth Century and the Diffusion of Renaissance Culture. A Bibliography of the Secondary Literature (ca. 1750–1997)* (Modena: Panini, 2000). See also Luca Addante, *Eretici e libertini nel Cinquecento* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2010).

there was Anabaptism, which was distinguished by a rationalistic vein and the tendency to deny the divinity of Christ, who was considered simply as a man with numerous virtues worthy of emulation. Secondly, there was also a strong Millenarist component that made reference to Gioachino da Fiore and Savonarola. Although Millenarist ideas did not manifest themselves for long periods, they tended to emerge in periods of particular crisis and made a fundamental contribution to the history of religious dissent in sixteenth-century Venice, characterized by constant shifts and temporary adhesion to one or other movement of individuals which condensed different elements and messages. For example, a heretic could abandon Evangelical beliefs to join the Anabaptists, and from there embrace Millenarist ideas.¹¹⁴

Therefore, any philological attempt, especially when applied to the subordinate classes, is soon thwarted by the very nature of heterodox ideas, as they were expressed in homes, streets and public places. It is difficult to unravel this tangle because Italian heresy was genetically predisposed to a multiplicity of long-term results:

there is ... the fact that sixteenth-century heretical movements span a greater period of time than the one which the struggles and contrasts with the most striking characteristics seem to provide the sixteenth century with. The Catholic Reformation ... the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation: they have distant origins, like the Catholic Reformation movement; they go back beyond the Thirty Years' War to Pietism and Quietism and almost reach the previous century like in the case of the Erasmian tradition or the Socinian movement ... a very precise awareness, which leads Pilati and Radicati to link up explicitly with Fausto Sozzini again.¹¹⁵

Therefore, if the Reformation intervened in the structuring of heterodoxy in the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century, it did so first of all by bequeathing the conviction that it was possible to discuss and question even the holiest dogma, and by providing a series of arguments to do so. Indeed, seventeenth-century Venetian religious dissent comes across as a continual

¹¹⁴ Martin, *Venice's Hidden Enemies*, p. 16. On these aspects of the Reformation in Venice, see Ambrosini, *Storie di patrizi*; Stella, *Dall'anabattismo al socinanesimo nel Cinquecento Veneto*; and Aldo Stella, *Anabattismo e antitrinitarismo in Italia nel XVI secolo: nuove ricerche storiche* (Padua: Liviana, 1969) and 'La riforma protestante', in Gaetano Cozzi and Paolo Prodi (eds), *Storia di Venezia* (7 vols, Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1994), vol. 6, pp. 341–63.

¹¹⁵ Delio Cantimori, 'Prospettive di storia ereticale italiana del Cinquecento', in *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento e altri scritti*, A. Prosperi (ed.) (Turin: Einaudi, 1992), p. 426.

interweaving and overlapping of different doctrines, unscrupulously removed from their contexts and often cemented together by the desire to break away from the official religion. For example, the problem of the theory of religions as political imposture could be seen in many different ways. It sometimes stemmed from a solidly libertine mould and therefore went as far as rejecting the religion itself. Alternatively, by pursuing a line followed elsewhere by Radicati or Giannone among others, the fight against sacerdotal imposture led directly to the rediscovery of the original evangelical meaning in the sole figure of Christ. The similarities with Protestant culture in the latter well-documented trend are easily recognizable, while they are only implicit in other cases.

In short, in the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century theories such as denial of the divinity of Christ, purgatory and the effectiveness of the intercession of the saints seemed to maintain structured doctrines like Protestantism, Anabaptism or Antitrinitarianism as their immediate points of reference. This was as a result of the attraction they could exert and their threatening presence, which meant that similar attitudes and ideas were subsequently adopted. During the seventeenth century they progressively broke away from this foundation of institutionalized dissent and started to enjoy autonomous circulation more closely connected to a strong sense of independently cultivated scepticism. This means that attempts were no longer made to replace one doctrine with another; the focus was instead on rejecting contexts for the official doctrine. Even in cases where it is possible to find links, it seems fair to say that they were single elements inserted into individual systems of thought. The reference for those who expressed heterodox doctrines was therefore not an *ecclesia* but an imaginary community of strong spirits, which was entered as soon as something perceived to be heterodox, and therefore dangerous, was pronounced. It was no longer a question of belonging to a Church but to something largely earthly, a restricted club of thinkers.¹¹⁶ In this context there was no longer much point in cultivating personal convictions in private, as they needed to be expressed to have a frame of reference and to have any effect.¹¹⁷ Depending on the time and place in which they were expressed,

¹¹⁶ Jonathan Israel claims that all discussions about God, man and the world still assumed the form of confessional debates in around 1650. From the 1680s onwards, confessional conflict became less important and the main clash was between faith and unbelief. In light of the analysis offered here, I would tend to tone down this statement at the very least: *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity. 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 4.

¹¹⁷ ‘The words spoken in public were likely to have a certifying value’: Lauro Martines, *Strong Words. Writing and Social Strain in the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 243.

this obviously did not exclude the often common prudential practices of dissimulation typical of the period, but it is clear that it gradually became easier to find opportunities to express personal dissent, even in a violent way.

Even though the term ‘libertinism’ is extremely vague and was used to identify a range of different types of cultural unrest, generally assimilated on the basis of their use of themes that undermined the official religion and common morality, it seemed to provide this set of disjointed theories and convictions with some kind of *raison d’être* and theoretical support. It was an unconscious point of reference embodied in the ‘wits’ that people tried to imitate.¹¹⁸ At the same time it released individuals from the need to coordinate their personal convictions in an organized discourse, enabling them to use key words that were immediately associated with certain convictions and ways of being or behaving rather than a trend of thought, which was largely negatively defined as ‘derisive sneering about others’ credulousness, general rebellion, annoyance with doctrines and moral rules, a taste for scandal.’¹¹⁹ The state of mind was based on the desire to be able to live, believe or not believe at will. As the previously mentioned goldsmith Dario Doria was reported as replying in 1697 when taken to task for not complying with Christian practice: ‘he didn’t want to think about it, but live life his way, ... he did not confess or even want to confess, because he was not afraid of God.’¹²⁰ Unbelief, irreligiousness and even atheism were at the very least a propensity to question the revealed truths, defined as the tendency to attack Christian orthodoxy to different degrees of extremity from a cynical or deistic point of view.¹²¹ While the elements used to do this had distant origins, other intellectual tools had appeared in the meantime. To tell the truth, these tools

¹¹⁸ It is well known how the term ‘libertinism’ risks being vague and is therefore subject to multiple definitions. I feel that the negative definition, which presents Italian libertinism above all more as a state of mind featuring substantial rebellion against dogma and impositions of any kind as a result of conceptual and theoretical instruments borrowed in particular from the tradition of heterodox Aristotelianism, is still the most pertinent to the context. There is an unlimited bibliography on the topic and I will limit myself to referring to the reviews by Zoli, *L’Europa libertina*, and Isabelle Moreau, ‘Libertinisme et philosophie’, *Revue de Synthèse*, 1–2 (2002): 137–60. For more recent leanings, one essential point of reference is the updated critical review by Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, *Libertinage, irréligion, incroyance, athéisme dans l’Europe de la première modernité (XVI^e–XVII^e siècles). Une approche critique des tendances actuelles de la recherche (1998–2002)*, available online at http://www.ehess.fr/centres/grihl/DebatCritique/LibrePensee/Libertinage_0.htm.

¹¹⁹ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, p. 13.

¹²⁰ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 129, Doctor Neri file, trial against Dario Doria, spontaneous appearance by Don Francesco Pedrini on 12 November 1697.

¹²¹ Michael Hunter, ‘The Problem of “Atheism” in Early Modern England’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 35 (1985): 135–57, at p. 136.

were not really new, but as a result of the fact that they were expressed publicly by increasingly large numbers of individuals, they became widespread perhaps beyond all expectations.

Chapter 3

Paths of Scepticism

Imposture, politics and unbelief

A new feature of the seventeenth century was the extensive spread of the theory of the political imposture of religion, an intellectual device that facilitated the introduction of the many heterodox traditions which characterized religious dissent at the time. This was by no means a new idea; back in the second century Celsus bluntly stated that Moses and Christ had deceived ‘herdsmen and shepherds’ by resorting to tricks and opportunism.¹ After being taken up again, interpreted by Averroes² and gradually becoming part of the oral tradition, during the modern age the formulation of the theory was adapted and developed on several occasions by radical Averroists such as Pomponazzi, political philosophers

¹ Celso, *Il discorso vero*, G. Lanata (ed.) (Milan: Adelphi, 1987), pp. 65, 87 and 91. On the essential requirements of doctrine in the Classical Age, see the summary in Gregory, *Theophrastus redivivus*, pp. 99–125 and Paganini, ‘Legislatores et impostores’.

² Even though *The Penguin Book of Firsts* states that this was already a Confucian formulation in the fifth century BC: Matthew Richardson, *The Penguin Book of Firsts* (London: Penguin, 1997). Among the many accounts of the Averroistic formulation, see Averroè, *L'incoerenza dell'incoerenza dei filosofi*, M. Campanini (ed.) (Turin: UTET, 1997), p. 532: ‘philosophers believe that religions are necessary constructs for civilisation’. For a reading of thirteenth-century Parisian radical Aristotelianism, to which the following reflection is highly indebted, see Renan, *Averroès et l'Averroïsme* and Étienne Gilson, ‘La doctrine de la double vérité’, in *Etudes de philosophie médiévale* (Strasbourg: Faculté de Lettres, 1921), in particular pp. 69–71; Luca Bianchi, *Il vescovo e i filosofi. La condanna parigina del 1277 e l'evoluzione dell'aristotelismo filosofico* (Bergamo: Lubrina, 1990) and *Censure et liberté intellectuelle à l'université de Paris (XIII^e–XIV^e siècles)* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1999); Frajese, ‘Ateismo’. On Averroism in general and subsequent interpretations of it, especially in Padua, Bruno Nardi, *Saggi sull'aristotelismo padovano dal secolo XIV al XVI* (Florence: Sansoni, 1958) is still an important work, while Sacerdoti, *Sacrificio e sovranità* offers an interpretation which is very close to that of Leo Strauss. See, for example, Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). See also the analysis by Carlo Ginzburg, *Occhiacci di legno. Nove riflessioni sulla distanza* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1998), Chapter 2, ‘Mito. Distanza e menzogna’, pp. 40–81, which takes into consideration the political use of myth starting from Plato and Aristotle and moving through the treatise of the three imposters to the *Esprit de Spinoza*, in which religion moved from being a necessary pretence to an instrument of oppression that needed to be overthrown.

like Machiavelli (especially in his treatment of the Romans' religion in *Discourses*) and Bodin, or even by heterodox thinkers such as Bruno and Campanella. It was embraced by the major seventeenth-century libertine movement and ended up as one of the cornerstones of anti-Christian and irreligious criticism.³ Even though it was – as everyone knew – a highly dangerous device that needed to be kept quiet and hidden, in Venice at least libertine principles that openly referred to the doctrine in question soon started to spread even beyond the social circles where they had originally been noticed and became part of the world view of a gradually increasing number of individuals. In this way the already widespread secular form of anti-clericalism, which had gained ground in the sixteenth century on the back of the Reformation and the numerous heterodox groups that emerged in the Venetian Republic, even if only briefly, grew during the seventeenth century to provide a more organic vision. It started to be used in the context of a broad structured attack, no longer just against the Church as an institution but often extending to the whole of Christianity and sometimes religion in general.⁴ With gradually increasing resonance, especially compared to the previous century, the clergy started to be thought of as a social group

³ For a primer, see Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*; Paganini, 'Legislatores et impostores'; Silvia Bianchi, 'Unmasking the Truth. The Theme of Imposture in Early Modern European Culture', in James E. Force and David S. Katz (eds), *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin. Essays in his Honor* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 21–36; Carlo Ginzburg, 'The Dovecote has Opened his Eyes. Popular Conspiracy in Seventeenth-Century Italy', in Gustav Henningsen, John Tedeschi and Charles Amiel (eds), *The Inquisition in Early Modern Europe. Studies on Sources and Methods* (DeKalb ILL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1986), pp. 190–8; Carlo Ginzburg, 'The Theme of Forbidden Knowledge in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Past and Present*, 73 (1976): 28–41; Ginzburg, *Occhiacci di legno*; Pierre-François Moreau, 'La crainte a engendré les dieux', *Libertinage et philosophie*, 4 (2000): 179–216; Sacerdoti, *Sacrificio e sovranità*; Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, 'Imposture politique des religions et sagesse libertine', *Littératures Classiques*, 55 (2005): 27–42.

⁴ On Italian anti-clericalism, see Ottavia Niccoli, *La vita religiosa nell'Italia moderna. Secoli XV–XVIII* (Rome: Carocci, 2008) and above all Niccoli, *Rinascimento anticlericale*. See also Peter A. Dykema and Heiko A. Oberman (eds), *Anticlericalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), especially the contributions by Heiko A. Oberman, 'Anticlericalism as an Agent of Change', pp. ix–xi, and Silvana Seidel Menchi, 'Characteristics of Italian Anticlericalism', pp. 271–81. Some important considerations are made in Elena Brambilla, *Alle origini del Sant'Uffizio. Penitenza, confessione e giustizia spirituale dal medioevo al XVI secolo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000), Chapter 12, 'Verso la riforma', pp. 321–43. Anti-clericalism often took on the form of the literary *topos* that presented friars and the clergy in general as parasites and cheats: see Emilio Pasquini, 'Clero e pubblico parrocchiale nei testi letterari', in *Pievi e parrocchie in Italia nel basso Medioevo (secoli XIII–XV)* (Rome: Herder, 1984) and Gaetano Greco, *La Chiesa in Italia nell'età moderna* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1999), p. 95.

that used bogus concepts such as punishments or rewards after death to keep society within closely controlled limits. These controls were exerted in the fields of sex, behaviour and thinking in general. Therefore, even though religion was widely accepted as a necessary surveillance device to maintain the social fabric, it came to be considered above all as an instrument of control, a set of dogma, norms and prescriptions completely removed from any considerations of the afterlife. The view of religion as an essential instrument of social control was an almost universally accepted fact for both the libertines and the supporters of the Counter-Reformation, but few went as far as the radical conclusion that the sets of norms and dogma guaranteed by an authority in the next life had given rise to pointless harmful institutions that needed to be abolished.⁵ However, the very act of identifying power devices in the traditional religions – regardless of the necessity of their role – implied an awareness that gradually led many to strip religion of any meaning beyond worldly experience, and in the case of Catholicism to refute the role played by the Church of Rome as the repository of any transcendent truth: in the mid-eighteenth century Don Cristoforo Venier was still claiming that ‘tradition, scripture, the facts ... everything stems from deceit’, revisiting themes that had already been circulated widely for decades.⁶

The issue of unbelief in seventeenth-century Venice was played out against the backdrop of the large-scale acceptance of the lowering of religion to a purely worldly and political status – or rather as a ‘political mantle’.⁷ As we have seen, its most characteristic elements were the traditional features of libertinism: the

⁵ On the history of this concept and its decline, in addition to Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, see David Wootton, ‘The Fear of God in Early Modern Political Theory’, in *Historical Papers 1983* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1984), pp. 56–80 and id., *From Duty to Self-Interest*, in David Wootton (ed.), *Divine Right and Democracy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), pp. 58–77. In a letter to Guy Patin, Gabriel Naudé explained how Cesare Cremonini had confided to some friends that he did not believe in the existence of God or the devil, let alone that the soul was immortal. Nevertheless he made sure that his manservant was a good Catholic, ‘de peur, disoit-il, s’il ne croyot rien, qu’un de ces matin il ne m’esgorgeseat dans mon lit’: quoted in René Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle. Nouvelle édition augmentée* (Geneva and Paris: Slatkine, 1983), p. 172.

⁶ According to Don Cristoforo, ‘starting from Moses and looking through the list of the other patriarchs one seduced the other, and coming to the figure of Jesus Christ, he said that he too was a sectarian like the others, and that he came to a bad end like the others, and that when on the cross, he didn’t know which was greater, Jesus Christ’s pain or his pleasure at seeing Mary Magdalene below the cross with bare breasts’: ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 148, trial against Don Cristoforo Venier, spontaneous appearance by Don Daniele Molin on 1 March 1763.

⁷ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 132, trial ‘of 5 March’, deposition by Antonio Partenio on 8 April 1705, cc. 8r bis.

hollow outward appearance of religious ceremonies,⁸ confession as a means of social control, the non-existence of purgatory in particular, but often of heaven and hell too, the confident assertion that the soul was mortal and so on, until even the very existence of God was denied. Whether all or only a few of these ideas were combined, they became part of everyday discussions and thus found new vigour and a new *raison d'être*. It was, however, the theory of the political imposture of religion that acted as a binding force between these fragmented ideas and vindicated them. At the very least it provided an argument which freed people from the idea of sin, as sin was seen as no more than a human invention.

In this respect, let us consider the attitude towards sexual behaviour, which was one of the main practical manifestations of unbelief and the concept of religious faith as mere convention.⁹ Here, religious indifference was as much an application of the principle whereby 'copulation' was not a sin since the senses had to be satisfied as a prerequisite. It could therefore be used as a kind of theoretical justification both for oneself and those who needed to be persuaded. For example, in 1681 Matteo Roder was convinced 'that womanizing was God's command in order to help them',¹⁰ while the view that 'the sin of womanizing is the least of the mortal sins' was fairly widespread. In 1682 Vittoria Lusdafer stated that she had 'heard it said several times by different people'.¹¹ A cook who worked for a doctor in San Trovaso explained the matter to Margherita

⁸ 'Zannade', as they were defined in 1653 by Count Cristoforo da Canal, rector on the island of Brazza. This meant that they were worthy of the Zanni mask and were therefore nothing more than performances. The count also denied the immortality of the soul, that the pope was the Vicar of Christ and that incarnation took place during consecration: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 85, 2 May 1653.

⁹ There are some interesting considerations regarding the lack of regulation of sexual habits in modern Italy in Nicholas Davidson, 'Theology, Nature and the Law: Sexual Sin and Sexual Crime in Italy from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century', in Trevor Dean and Kate J.P. Lowe (eds), *Crime, Society and the Law in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 74–98. For more general information on this, see: Peter Cryle and Lisa O'Connell (eds), *Libertine Enlightenment: Sex, Liberty and Licence in the Eighteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); James G. Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture 1630–1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and *Schooling Sex: Libertine Literature and Erotic Education in Italy, France, and England, 1534–1685* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Katherine Crawford, *Sexualities in Europe, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), in particular pp. 189–231. See also Faramerz Daboiwhala, 'Lust and Liberty', *Past and Present*, 207 (2010): 89–179.

¹⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 122, trial against Matteo Roder, spontaneous appearance by Giovan Carlo Malipiero on 27 February 1681.

¹¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 123, trial against Francesco Muselani, deposition by Vittoria Lusdafer on 23 July 1682, c. 4r.

Mezanelli in 1702 and went even further: ‘the sin of the flesh was not a sin’. When questioned again on the matter by Margherita two weeks later, she expanded her reasoning: ‘when you are in love with someone, and you desire him, to procure pleasure by yourself ... is not a sin’. These were not new concepts for Margherita, as they confirmed what she had heard some years before in Verona from a girl called Angelica Quinta in a ‘community of women’. They had spoken ‘about impure dishonest acts among whores’ and Angelica had claimed that although the confessor maintained the contrary, in her opinion they were not sins, ‘because they were not done out of malice but goodwill’. She must have sounded convincing, because Margherita had also been embracing the idea of goodwill for some time.¹²

The belief that copulation ‘between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman’ was not a sin became fairly widespread throughout the period in question. In its broadest and least assertive formulation this theory provided a fundamentally political explanation for the restrictions on sexuality, seen not as based on Scripture but introduced later by a Church that followed earthly logic like every institution throughout history. The turning point was identified, as it often was, as the Council of Trent. It was widely believed that before this there had not been many restrictions and life in general had been rosier. The Council added a series of prescriptions to the life of Christians which had no foundation in the holy texts or reasonable justification in the light of rational analysis.¹³ This argument must have been quite influential and widely used. An example is provided by Fra’ Illuminato Festa in 1688, in an attempt – the success or failure of which is not known – to seduce a woman: ‘before the Council of Trent carnal sins were not sins, not even venial ones’.¹⁴ In 1711 the theory was

¹² ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 130, abate Menoncour file, spontaneous appearance by Margherita Mezanelli on 28 November 1702.

¹³ With regard to how the Council of Trent treated the subject of confession, see Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, pp. 257–77.

¹⁴ It seems that he also tried a humorous approach to seduction. Calling himself Illuminato (the enlightened one), he suggested that the penitent transgressed with him because ‘if I had agreed, I would have been enlightened’: ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 131, trial against Fra’ Illuminato Festa, spontaneous appearance by Maria Tisa on 9 December 1688. The friar’s name cropped up again a few years later with regard to events involving Antonia Zorzona, a woman who loved dressing as a man and who had worked as a sailor on ships. After being persuaded to be reconciled with God on the occasion of the 1700 Jubilee, she went to San Francesco della Vigna to confess, only to find Fra’ Illuminato, who started the confession ‘as usual among males, without the need of railings. Then, since he doubted I was a woman, he asked me to show him my breasts, and I uncovered and showed them to him. He kept on telling me to take my trousers off, but I replied that I did not want to do so in front of the temple of God. And I can remember that when I showed him my breasts, he touched

adopted by Angelo Savioli without any major amendments and turned into a topic of conversation and persuasion.¹⁵ In the same year a priest called Agostino Ciceri strongly supported the idea that the sexual act did not constitute a sin if it helped to maintain health. In any case, he continued, 'the canon of the Council of Trent, which forbade the sin of the flesh, had not really been approved'.¹⁶

In addition to the lack of chronological continuity in the matter, the fact that sexual relations between unmarried couples were forbidden for reasons wholly unconnected to genuine religious motivation was widely accepted. In 1693 Zuanne Cattaneo tried to convince Costantino Morosini's maids that the sexual act 'between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman' was not a sin and that it had 'been prohibited for political reasons, so that men and women did not copulate like beasts who do it in the street'.¹⁷ According to Don Pietro Buora in 1710, the prohibition had been introduced 'by civil and ecclesiastical law with regard to uncertainties about offspring'. The use of the word 'fornication, does

them with his own hands'. After drawing up her certificate, Illuminato invited her to his cell, but while climbing the stairs they met two arsenal workers who knew her and pointed out to the friar that she was a woman and could therefore not enter the monastery: *ibid.*, spontaneous appearance by Antonia Zorzona on 31 March 1707. Fra' Illuminato, who died of heart failure in prison on 25 February 1709, remembered this strange encounter clearly. For news of his death, see *ibid.*, session on 28 February 1708, appearance by the Captain of the Sant'Uffizio. For statements about the woman, see the declaration on 7 February 1708.

¹⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, trial against Angelo Savioli, deposition by monk Paolo Antonio Grandoni on 5 May 1711. On other occasions techniques became more imaginative. Take, for example, Abbot Giuseppe Ghinelli, working in Venice in around 1710. He claimed that he had obtained 'the authority to confess some people three or four times a year'. The reasoning he used was 'that he was a virgin, and that because of his virginity, by joining carnally with a woman who had lost her virginity, the union made her a virgin once again, also recounting that a certain young woman ... having been deflowered, by joining carnally with him reacquired the virginity she had lost, and became a nun after she was examined and found to be a virgin'. And this was certainly not a sin: 'a union for a purpose such as the above, namely to acquire virginity, was not a sin': ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 135, Don Giovanni Dudoni file, trial against Abbot Giuseppe Ghinelli, spontaneous appearance by Laura Bavi on 1 September 1711.

¹⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 136, trial against Don Agostino Ciceri and Luigi Bellati, spontaneous appearance by Giacomo Negri on 20 July 1713. The fact that the sexual act was good for the health was proved by the case of St Louis, who died as a result of being too chaste and continent.

¹⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 127, Domenico Cavalieri file, trial against Zuanne Cattaneo, spontaneous appearance by Caterina Augusta Saccini on 1 December 1693. It was therefore for political reasons or, as Abbot Giovan Domenico Bonlini asserted in 1737, 'for financial reasons, but not because there is anything intrinsically wrong with it': ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 142, trial against Giovan Domenico Bonlini, spontaneous appearance by Don Innocenzo Cherubini on 30 January 1738.

not mean copulation between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman ... which is something different'.¹⁸ Even the frequently mentioned Maltese Abbot Muselani, who was working in Venice in the 1680s, lived with a certain Vittoria while regularly celebrating Mass at San Giovanni Novo. He justified himself by saying 'that it was not a sin to associate with women' and for added coherence also pointed out 'that there was no heaven or hell, and that the Masses held are good for nothing and are not useful to souls, but that they are only there to give a livelihood to priests and friars'. As for marriage, it had been created 'only so that men and women do not use public roads'. Vittoria was not the only person to benefit from such explanations, as Muselani offered them publicly. This once again highlights how attempts were made to find the reasons for prohibitions and establish commonly accepted moral codes in the field of social discipline.¹⁹

While on the one hand the proliferation of the idea of religion as an imposture met with ample consensus as a result of this type of concrete translation into prescriptions and obligations, on the other hand certain historical figures in the second half of the seventeenth century offered large-scale immediate confirmation and a vivid portrayal of the impostor-legislator, a figure that everybody had come across to some extent.²⁰ Events in England, most notably those involving James Nayler – a Quaker who announced in 1656 that he was Jesus Christ and led a messianic movement before dying of hardship in prison – cannot have had much influence on the Venetians.²¹ Instead, the story

¹⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 135, Don Giovanni Dudoni file, trial against Don Pietro Buora, spontaneous appearance by Don Gasparo Pisani on 26 August 1710.

¹⁹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 123, trial against Francesco Muselani, spontaneous appearance by Antonia Valotti on 14 July 1682, cc. 1r–v.

²⁰ 'A legislator is someone who founds an empire under new auspices of religion and laws, arms and rites, like Moses in a good way and Mohammed in a bad way. A legislator must either be God, like Christ, or a messenger of God, like Moses, or a highly astute politician, like Minos, Macomet, Giove, Osiri and the like, who pretended to have been sent by God to have esteem, because a legislator must be highly praised, extremely wise, divine, deeply religious and superhuman': Tommaso Campanella, *Aforismi politici*, L. Firpo (ed.) (Turin: Giappichelli, 1941), n. 50, p. 107. On this subject, see also Ernst, *Tommaso Campanella*, pp. 85–104.

²¹ Among the many English messiahs at the time, Nayler suffered the worst fate. Prison and whippings were the reward for having entered Bristol on Palm Sunday in 1656, riding a donkey behind women scattering flowers. There is more information in Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975); Pietro Adamo, *Il Dio dei blasfemi. Anarchici e libertini nella Rivoluzione Inglese* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 1993) at pp. 117–30 and 356; and especially Leo Damrosch, *The Sorrows of the Quaker Jesus: James Nayler and the Puritan Crackdown on the Free Spirit* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

of Sabbatai Sevi, a Jew from Smirne, must have resonated more widely across the city. After he proclaimed that he was the Messiah in 1665, his fame spread rapidly even outside Jewish communities throughout Europe as a result of the dense communication network between communities and through the mediation of Venetian, Dutch and English merchants and travellers.²² His preaching and the expectations raised by his calls for repentance, religious reform and moral rebirth created significant public order problems, even in Constantinople, where many Jews abandoned themselves to excesses as they believed that Sabbatai would perform miracles upon his arrival. During the war in Candia, events in Turkey were of great interest to Venice and the population of the city. The conflict had also started attracting the attention of Europe, gripped by the efforts of the old Republic left alone to hold the Turkish threat in check. The decisive financial and organizational aid from the papacy, which had abolished several religious orders to channel the assets into military use, also made the conflict somewhat similar to a crusade.

This atmosphere of general agitation was fertile ground for Sabbatai, the first promoter of a messianic movement that moved beyond a local scale and spread ‘wherever Jews lived – from Yemen, Persia and Kurdistan to Poland, Holland, Italy, and Morocco’.²³ Rumours fuelled by pamphlets and varying reports claimed that more than a million Jews from the lost tribes of Israel were preparing an attack against Mecca in an attempt to conquer the Holy Land. In October 1665 letters had already reached Venice telling of enthusiasm for the new Messiah, an enthusiasm which was spreading in a way that worried rabbis in the city and aroused the keen interest of the Venetian government, which followed the matter attentively as the messiah’s work was likely to cause problems for the Turks. Therefore, when Sultan Mohammed IV had him arrested while staying in Constantinople, diplomatic channels supplied the government with ample information regarding the nature of the arrest and the development of the affair. All the conditions were therefore in place for Sabbatai to attract interest and for the vicissitudes of the movement to be followed in Venice, a city with a sizeable well-structured Jewish community within which all Jewish persuasions at the time came together, integrated or clashed. Indeed, the community must have been fairly receptive to the messianic upsurge as it proved impossible to oppose the general fervour, despite the scepticism and cautioning of rabbis and the prohibition on speaking about messianic movements in public or in the presence

²² For events involving Sabbatai Zevi, see Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah 1626–1676* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) and, in brief, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1974). See also Matt Goldish, *The Sabbatean Prophets* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

²³ Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi*, p. 2.

of Christians. However, one traveller who visited the area between 1665 and 1666 felt that it was not only Venice but the whole of Northern Italy that was caught up in the phenomenon.²⁴ Poems were written in Venice in the messiah's honour, just as they were in Kurdistan and Amsterdam. Reports and posters translated into Dutch, English, German and Italian started to be circulated and read widely. Rabbis all over Europe, who were in constant contact with each other, were powerless to hold the phenomenon in check.

The excitement reached a peak on 15 September 1666 when Sabbatai Sevi converted from Judaism to Islam on the pain of death from the Sultan and became Aziz Mahmed Effendi. He worked as 'the palace gatekeeper' and was later given a pension by the Sultan himself. It seems that he became depressed after his conversion and the event certainly saddened his followers, who suffered a significant blow. Some interpreted the apostasy as a phase in Sabbatai's messianic career, but most lost interest. The best way to interpret what had happened was to forget and the rabbis adopted this approach. A systematic removal of events was carried out, including written traces, so that officially nothing had happened. Nevertheless, one of the last devoted followers of the messiah, Nathan of Gaza, took it upon himself to provide an explanation of Sabbatai's behaviour, more or less restating the Christian paradox of the cross: the messiah had had to suffer humiliation in order to go along with the divine plan. In 1668 Nathan went to Venice and was welcomed by a sizeable group of followers.²⁵ Declarations of loyalty towards the messiah had not stopped. While exiled in Albania in 1673, Sabbatai received regular visits from groups of followers and continued to see and present himself as he had always done. When he died on 17 September 1676, Nathan put about the idea that it was a cover-up and that in reality he was still alive.

Even though the movement continued to some extent after his death, especially in Venice, following his conversion in 1666 it was already clear that his reputation would be more as an impostor than a messiah, however misunderstood he may have been. Interpreted in the light of examples of the many impostor-legislators in the past, his case was the exemplification of how a religious movement could be created, controlled and expanded to reach maximum intensity. There were just as many points in support of the doctrine of the imposture of religion: had Moses and Christ not done the same thing, albeit with greater tactical shrewdness? And what about Numa Pompilius and Mohammed? The fact was that all over Europe a wealth of printed and handwritten literature – second-hand or otherwise, as in the case of the famous

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 480ff.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 764ff.

Espion turc – depicted Zevi as a fraudster, who had covered up an extremely worldly attempt to control people through their consciences with religious meanings and pretexts.²⁶

Many felt that it was certainly not the first case of its kind, as numerous people had preceded him and shown the way forward to different degrees and with varying success. Even those who saw Christ as an impostor had to recognize his skill in establishing an orthodoxy, a system of power, an extensive structure and a body of functionaries employed to defend the system. All these things were lacking or fleetingly present in the Sevi affair. However, it is not surprising that while such episodes provided some with a lesson in scepticism, they offered others models or points of reference.

At different levels and at least in terms of their intentions, a fair number of people at the time aspired to rise to the role of guide to groups whose solidity was proportionate to their ambitions. Antonio Servi, a painter originally from Trier who lived in Verona and Venice at the end of the seventeenth century, made no mystery of the fact that he wanted ‘to make a new law, above all the other laws, and particularly about our faith, and Christian catholic law’.²⁷ The foundations of this new law are somewhat obscure and might also have been so for those who shared in Antonio’s predictions. However, he was adamant that he was ready to print a book that proved ‘that our faith is falsehood and madness’. According to the theory of religious imposture, Holy Scripture was ‘a vain story,

²⁶ The first Italian book devoted to Sabbatai was Carlo Alfano (perhaps Fridericus Ragstat de Weile), *Il Sabathai overo il finto Messia degli Ebrei* (Viterbo: s.n., 1669). Also widely read was John Evelyn, *The History of the Three Late Famous Impostors, viz. Padre Ottomano, Mahomed Bei, and Sabatai Sevi [...] With a Brief Account of the Ground, and Occasion of the Present War between the Turk and the Venetian. Together with the Cause of the Final Extirpation [...] of the Jews out of the Empire of Persia*, in the Savoy (London), printed for Henry Herringman, 1669. The German translation was also published in 1669: *Historia de tribus hujus seculi famosis impostoribus, dass ist Beschreibung der dreyen unlängst beruffenen Betrieger, nemlich des Padre Ottomanno, Mahomed Bei oder Johann Michael Cigola, und Sabatai Sevi [...] Aus dem Englischen ins Teutsche übersetzt*, s.l. 1669. Evelyn’s text then formed the basis of Paul Rycaut, *The History of the Turkish Empire from the Year 1623 to the Year 1677. Containing the Lives of the Three Last Emperours*, printed by J.M., for John Starkey, London, 1680, translated into French in 1683. For a first survey on this topic, see Richard H. Popkin, ‘Three English Tellings of the Sabbatai Zevi Story’, *Jewish History*, 8 (1994): 43–54. All these works might have been the basis for *Espion turc*. On this issue, see Gian Carlo Roscioni, *Sulle tracce dell’«esploratore turco»*. *Letteratura e spionaggio nella cultura libertina del Seicento* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1992), pp. 341–60.

²⁷ Here, as in most cases, the term ‘law’ was used ‘in the pregnant sense, usual in the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, of political-religious law or, more precisely, of fundamental religious law used as a foundation of the political community’: Frajese, *Profezia e machiavellismo*, pp. 77–8.

written by mundane men, in different times, to their own advantage'. Dogma consequently lost its value: the Virgin, for example, whose conception was seen as anything but immaculate, was supposed to have given birth to other children besides Jesus Christ.²⁸ Moreover, it was better not to put too much trust in the latter as he could neither read nor write. This historical re-reading of the life of Christ continued with the refusal to believe in both the crucifixion, where St John was said to have been in his place, and his divine nature. It was felt that Christ referred to himself as the son of God in a figurative way, in the sense that all men had the same right to do so.

The extensive spread of the theory of the impostor-legislator therefore enabled many people to put themselves on at least the same level as Christ. If he had been able to establish his own law by passing himself off as the son of God and deceiving people, why could someone else not follow suit? Around 100 years earlier in 1582, a certain Noël Journet had been burnt at the stake in Metz. He had also wanted to make a new law and had written two books, which went up in flames with him. Journet revisited the critical controversy about biblical texts: how could Moses have written Deuteronomy when it included an account of his death? For that matter, how could the Egyptian priests even have done it, given that Moses had transformed water into blood all over the country? The awareness that Moses and above all Christ had been men like any others led Journet to think that he could present himself not so much as another messiah but as a new impostor-legislator.²⁹ The conceptual tool offered by the doctrine of the impostor-legislator therefore removed the element of revelation from the religious message and, as a result, the comparison with orthodoxy had to continue in terms of moral values, forms of worship and social institutions governed by the Church.

²⁸ Doubts over the Immaculate Conception – not yet dogma and for centuries at the heart of theological discussions which were sometimes even bitter – were extremely widespread: to mention just one case, in 1740 Lorenzo Sartori, a priest from Mestre, claimed that the Madonna had been born 'of infamous progeny'. The denial of the Immaculate Conception of Mary also often overlapped with the different question of the denial of her virginity, thus becoming somewhat blurred: even Sartori also questioned her virtue, stating with regard to a young woman that she was more chaste 'than the Virgin Mary because she didn't sin however much she was tempted, while if the Virgin had been tempted, she would've fallen': ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 54, document written by consultant Fra' Paolo Celotti on 3 May 1741. See also ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 194, 8 May 1741. Trial in ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 143.

²⁹ The episode is carefully analysed in François Berriot, 'Hétérodoxie religieuse et utopie politique dans les "erreurs étranges" de Noël Journet (1582)', *Bullettin de la Société de l'histoire du protestantisme français*, 124 (1978): 236–48. See also ASV, *Senato, Dispacci dei rettori, Udine e Friuli*, b. 4. Thanks to Antonio Conzato for bringing this to my attention.

Unsurprisingly, traditional prayers were not suitable for Antonio Servi's 'new law'. Therefore, after lambasting the Lord's Prayer and *Ave Maria* at length, Antonio felt it was time to act himself and composed his own prayer, which he always carried with him. Witnesses reported that it praised the only God copiously over an entire *folio*. The stress placed on the unique nature of God, thereby countering the doctrine of the Trinity, somehow made him feel closer to Islam. He believed that Mohammed's law was the closest to the truth, 'because it is about God alone'.³⁰ It was this emphasis on the centrality and exclusivity of the divine figure that was most important to him and which he put forward incessantly using different but always very forceful arguments in conversations in the street, *spezierie* and in frequent private conversations. In this way he offered a simplification of religious facts that inevitably earned him a reputation as an 'atheist, heretical and evil in nature'. In his opinion this simplification was the only answer to the problems thrown up in discussions about religions – an increase in the number of faiths only led to 'simony and fraud' – so much so that he claimed that his whole doctrine could be summed up by the words 'only God is true'.

Many people were 'completely confused' by this new proposition of faith, and he must have had winning arguments, as he exerted a certain influence at different levels. While he discussed Molinos with some, praising his thinking and defending him against accusations from priests who 'speak badly about him out of political perspicacity, and publish lies and hide what he said, because if they published what he really said ... the world would embrace his truth', with others he was prepared to compromise in providing evidence: if the saints could work miracles, why did they put up with flies and bugs landing on their images and soiling them?³¹

The records do not tell us what happened to Antonio and whether the Sant'Uffizio believed him to be dangerous and thus worthy of investigation or punishment. Equally, they do not reveal much about others like him who tried to make critical use of their powers of reasoning with the scant tools available and involved a large number of individuals in their attempts. Although only marginal witness accounts of these attempts are left, the fact remains that real figures existed, with different degrees of impact on people's lives, which can be used to measure the scope of the idea of religion as a political invention. These points of reference were easy to recognize and interpret in terms of the impostor-legislator, also as a result of the tools offered by Catholic polemics, which had done so much to present Luther and all the reformers as deceivers who had

³⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 129, trial against Antonio Servi, spontaneous appearance by Lazzaro Albertani on 10 February 1699.

³¹ Ibid., written document by Lazzaro Albertani dated 22 August 1699.

disguised political content in religious clothing. Luther, Calvin and sometimes even Moses were depicted as astute leaders, who by presenting themselves as acting in the name of God had enslaved the consciences of individuals with the spectre of religion.³² After the categories had been created and assimilated, it was not difficult to add one figure or another: whether it was Numa Pompilius, Moses, Christ, Mohammed, Luther, Sabbatai or all the prophets, they were all individuals who had established sets of norms, secured by a system of rewards and punishments to be enjoyed in the afterlife and feared to a certain extent in this world too, with the sole aim of keeping people in a subordinate position to prevent them from opening their eyes. ‘Christ was not the son of God, but a wise magician, who let himself be crucified to seem, and be believed to be such, but it was not, and ... he did what he did with virtue’, claimed Flaucurt, a Frenchman, publicly in the 1670s. Michelangelo Salomoni, a doctor who frequented the same circles, echoed his words: ‘our Lord Jesus Christ, what a good deceiver he was; he called himself God, but there is only one God, he is impassible, while Jesus Christ was passible, he ate, drank and slept’.³³ Regardless of value judgments on the quality of products, it is certain that a good deal of reasoning was carried out about the historical figure of Christ. While the paradox of the cross had already troubled the minds of generations of believers and offered critical tools to sceptics, the danger was now more general, as the risk was that the positions in question would lead to radical results. According to Domenico Cavagnin, a scribe, in the 1690s, religion was an invention of sovereigns:

to keep men obedient, seeing that arms were not enough ... Numa Pompilius was the first to find this invention ... but one thing is forbidden to ordinary men, which is allowed to sovereigns, and other things are forbidden to women, and as proof of this he said that the King of France was allowed to have many people killed, that if it were true that there was a hell, the confessors would be the first to go there as they use religion to deceive.³⁴

³² Spini, ‘Alcuni appunti sui libertini italiani’, p. 119.

³³ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 119, trial against Federico Gualdi, spontaneous appearance by Francesco Giusto on 16 June 1676, cc. n.n. and written denunciation by Francesco presented on 21 April 1676, c. 1v bis. The ‘Christ the Magician’ theory – an element shared by the Judaic and subsequent pagan traditions – was traditionally one of the arguments most frequently used by libertines in anti-Christian polemics. See, for example, Elisabetta Scapparone, ‘“Efficacissimus Dei filius”. Sul Cristo mago di Bruno’, in *La magia nell’Europa moderna. Tradizioni e mutamenti* (Florence: Olschki, 2007), pp. 417–44.

³⁴ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 126, trial against Domenico Cavagnin, spontaneous appearance by Elena Cavagnin on 11 September 1692.

The world was therefore seen as governed by the balance of power, whereby any means was justified in order to maintain it. Man himself, on the other hand, was not really so different from the beasts. The only thing that distinguished him from capons was that ‘we eat capons, and they do not eat us’.³⁵ In these terms, the move from considerations of a religious nature – Cavagnin had begun by stating that the soul was mortal – to political-social connotations was potentially subversive.³⁶

While Cavagnin felt that the move had been stimulated by a combination of Machiavellian traditions, readings of world events and criticism of religious dogma, the theory of political imposture more often found a natural application in economic terms and was measured through the daily articulation of worship, rituals and religious acts. The idea of the worthlessness of confession, clearly linked to Reformation influences and already widespread in heterodox discourses in the second half of the sixteenth century, gradually overlapped during the following two centuries both with the traditional deep-rooted anti-clerical trend that distinguished the peninsula³⁷ and with the by then rampant theory of the imposture of religion. Confession was not only seen as worthless but also as something to avoid, as it was an instrument used by the clergy to control consciences, learn secrets and dominate people. In Sarpi’s opinion:

This is one of the Papacy’s greatest secrets, used to convince and gently instil every doctrine which is useful to it, and used to channel all those doctrines which cannot be proposed publicly as they are violent and seditious, which if proposed in books would be contradicted by someone at least, who would thus discover the trick, but during confession the penitent does not dare to let even the slightest doubt enter his mind.

By using it, they maintained ‘the most profitable maxims for the Papacy, that no sin is remitted if the pope does not want it to be, that no soul is saved without him, that it is better to obey him like God Himself, and that he alone decides

³⁵ Ibid., spontaneous appearance by Francesca Canciani on 13 March 1692. The extensive similarities between man and beast were a recurring theme in anti-Christian and irreligious thought. See, for example, the position expressed in Chapter II of treatise VI of the *Theophrastus redivivus*. On this aspect, see Gregory, *Theophrastus redivivus*, pp. 83–4 and 190–191.

³⁶ ‘[A]s we are born like beasts, we also die like beasts, and nobody could know about our souls after the death of the body’: ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 126, trial against Domenico Cavagnin, spontaneous appearance by Elena Cavagnin on 11 September 1692.

³⁷ Niccoli, *Rinascimento anticlericale*.

what is right or wrong, lawful or unlawful, a sin or a merit and permitted or forbidden'.³⁸

A fairly stereotypical set of images was used to define scepticism about the institution of penitence. While Menocchio felt that confessing to a priest was the same as doing it to a tree,³⁹ in 1679 Girolama Bonotti claimed that 'you might as well confess to a passer-by or to the wall, you mustn't tell anybody your personal business'.⁴⁰ Federico Gualdi was sure that his maids were 'real fools to go and tell the confessor your business'.⁴¹ At approximately the same time, the previously mentioned merchant Matteo Roder forcefully asserted 'that many confessions are invented by friars for their own interests',⁴² while about 40 years later the image of a wall and the idea of the use of penitence for self-serving purposes were taken up again by Gasparo Arnaldi, a count from Vicenza who reminded a Jew in 1708 that 'Jews confess to a wall, and that our confession is similar madness', and then explained in a barbershop that 'confession was introduced to find out others' secrets and use this information for governing'.⁴³

In 1692 the previously-mentioned Grando de Grandi also offered a chronological basis, saying that confession had been 'introduced after the Council of Trent to find out the business of others'.⁴⁴ At the same time, there were still also those, like Antonio Zane in 1711, who refocused the matter around the issue of the centrality of the figure of God, implicitly criticizing the

³⁸ *Relazione dello stato della religione, e con quali disegni et arti ella è stata fabricata e maneggiata in diversi stati di queste occidentali parti del mondo*, p. 65. Through confession, wrote Giannone, the Jesuits had managed to convince two out of three Inquisitors of State to expel him from Venice in 1735. Giannone, *La vita di Pietro Giannone*, vol. 2, pp. 292–3 and especially 'Ragguaglio dell'improvviso e violento ratto praticato in Venezia ad istigazione de' Gesuiti e della corte di Roma nella persona dell'avvocato Pietro Giannone', in S. Bertelli and G. Ricuperati (eds), *Opere* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1971), pp. 507–80. In this respect confession had to compete with the elements of an anti-Jesuit climate, still fairly lively in Venice, which was expressed through discourses that after being circulated and losing their immediate controversial connotation could make contact with other convictions and ideas, leading to outright rejection of the institution of penitence.

³⁹ Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, pp. 10, 43.

⁴⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 121, trial against Girolama Bonotti, written denunciation presented on 22 August 1679 by Giovanni Radicio.

⁴¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 119, trial against Federico Gualdi, deposition by Rosanna Farfugiola on 5 May 1676, c. 9v.

⁴² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 122, trial against Matteo Roder, spontaneous appearance by Giovan Carlo Malipiero on 27 February 1681.

⁴³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, trial against Gasparo Arnaldi, spontaneous appearance by Don Giovan Francesco Griffolano on 24 May 1708.

⁴⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 127, trial against Grando de Grandi, spontaneous appearance by Antonio della Chiesa on 2 September 1692.

tradition; confession was not necessary, as God had not created it in the way that he had made the Eucharist, and it was sufficient to say the words ‘peccavi Domine, miserere mei’ (‘I have sinned O Lord, have mercy on me’) on the point of death.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the main argument was connected to the use of confession as an instrument for monitoring consciences and thoughts. In the mid-eighteenth century Giuseppe Zanchi, a priest, could still move around freely claiming that confession:

disguised as the sacrament of penitence is no more than a precept instituted by the heads of the Church following a request from the Catholic governors for purposes of occult politics, so that the sense of sin and the shame at having to confess it to another man acted as a brake on carrying out acts which would go against the interests of those on power. Therefore confession is ridiculous, a deceit invented by the ancients.

The Eucharist was also therefore no more than:

a political ceremony to reinforce penance, which deceives the unlearned with the vain glory of eternal life, and convinces them to live in poverty and mortification, insensible to the needs of their own nature. Thus their God makes them live unhappily, and die miserable.⁴⁶

The Church, with its rites and set of obligations and prohibitions, was part of something invented by the ‘great’ and powerful, who devised the expedient of religion to enslave the people. The Church used a variety of instruments to implement this control: all the sacraments, for example, were often considered as ‘*iura principatum* or Reasons of State’.⁴⁷ In 1711 Giacomo Stecchini, a painter, claimed that the invention of feast days was the product of the imagination of friars, who simply wanted to receive their share of donations on Sundays. On

⁴⁵ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 134, trial against Antonio Zane, spontaneous appearance by Domenico Rivaio, known as Caldana, on 21 July 1704.

⁴⁶ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 148, trial against Don Giuseppe Zanchi, spontaneous appearance by Don Pietro Diedo on 9 June 1760. In this case, Zanchi’s position indicates a higher level of reflection: confession was no longer used as an instrument for learning the secrets of others or more simply their business. It was a means of self-government that the Church had introduced so that people censored themselves. The Eucharist acted first of all on consciences in the same way. This awareness of the psychological and governing aspects of the system of prescriptive Church codes is interesting as it shows a significant variation in the interpretation of the theory of the imposture of religion.

⁴⁷ Frajese, *Sarpi scettico*, p. 135, and *Profezia e machiavellismo*, p. 78.

the other hand, even the commandments 'had been made by men with leisure, and who had money'.⁴⁸ There was no end of cases in which it was claimed that veneration and indulgences were no more than instruments specially created to tug at purse strings. At the start of the eighteenth century Antonio Partenio went as far as to say with some certainty that dietary restrictions had not been commanded by God, but were a mean expedient 'to make money from fishing'. More generally, many Church laws were not necessary and were even harmful 'by increasing the ways and circumstances of sin'.⁴⁹

This was a well-accepted reflection, as everybody knew that prohibitions generated the desire to transgress them and people could not be prevented from thinking and speaking. In 1647 the now familiar Faustina Cortesia expressed a consideration which was more or less implicit in many Venetian heterodox visions of the world at the time: 'talking ... to my parents about faith, I told them that it is forbidden to discuss faith because perhaps its reasons are not so strong, and by doing so you can never tell what you could discover'.⁵⁰ Matters of faith could not be discussed for fear of discovering how pointless they were. Prescriptions in this respect were therefore purely self-serving and were used to keep individuals in the dark about the truth. 'These ecclesiastical matters are no more than terror' was the phrase apparently repeated for at least 20 years from 1628 to 1648 by Leonardo of Verona, a Minim friar at the monastery of San Giobbe.⁵¹ In the 1690s Pietro Ormesini translated the theory of the political use of religion into elementary terms: 'just as you say ogre to children to scare them, so do preachers to cause fright, and it is just a means to frighten people, to make them live according to rules'.⁵² The population was like a child needing to be manipulated through fear, and it was therefore only ignorance that kept them enslaved. At around the same time Maria Desmit, a German noblewoman,

⁴⁸ The accuser, Bernardo Testi, wanted to prove his doctrinal knowledge to the Inquisitor, explaining that 'I believe that he spoke about the commandments of the law of God, of which there are ten'. The accused, on the other hand, could not understand how an omnipotent God needed to rest on the seventh day. The ideas of rest and omnipotence were not compatible: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 135, trial against Giacomo Stecchini, spontaneous appearance by Bernardo Testi on 21 May 1711.

⁴⁹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 132, trial 'of 5 March', deposition by Antonio Partenio on 8 April 1705, cc. 8r bis.

⁵⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 103, Salvatore Caravagio file, trial against Faustina Cortesia, spontaneous appearance by Faustina on 28 April 1647.

⁵¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 103, Giustina Sugolota file, written document against Fra' Leonardo presented on 27 June 1628. A series of investigations carried out in 1648 confirmed that the friar was coherent.

⁵² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 127, trial against Pietro Ormesini, deposition by Giacomo Gelmini on 7 February 1692.

convinced her maids 'that the rest of us ignorants allow ourselves to believe these things'.⁵³ More than 70 years earlier Costantino Saccardino, a charlatan from Bologna, had moved between Venice, Bologna and Ferrara to convert groups of artisans, teaching them that religion was a lie, with particular reference to the notion of hell. They were idiots for believing in it, because rulers wanted them to do so in order to make things happen in accordance with their wishes, but in the end the 'dovecot', the people, had opened their eyes and discovered the instruments used by those with power to 'sacrifice' the poor.⁵⁴

Saccardino's hope that this awareness would lead to immediate social repercussions was destined to be thwarted. However, in the light of what emerges from various sources, his words seem to go beyond the characteristic enthusiasm of prophetic proclamations; they seem to express a well-established fact, a situation that necessitated change at the very least. They acknowledge a world in which an increasingly large number of people were starting, albeit in a confused way, to see religion exclusively or primarily as a means to an end. However, the next step that Saccardino probably hoped for, the rejection of religion, was some way off being implemented in full, although seventeenth-century Venice did feature characters like the renowned doctor and antique dealer Nicolò Bon, who stated 'that the religions, whether Christian or the others' were no more than 'tricks invented by princes for political governing, and that one should only believe in Nature'.⁵⁵

Therefore, the starting point for reaching the conclusion that religion was simply an imposture was the direct observation of its functional use by those with political power and the clergy, engaged in governing society with a range of aims connected to an alliance of the powerful, financial reasons and preservation of the social fabric. In this respect the extensive spread of the theory of imposture became feasible in the special context of the Republic, where Padua and Venice were centres for distributing and spreading materialistic theories and Machiavelli's works respectively.⁵⁶ Editions of the Florentine's

⁵³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 126 trial against Maria Desmit, spontaneous appearance by Lucrezia Palamon on 12 June 1692.

⁵⁴ On the Saccardino affair and its implications for the study of relations between different levels of culture, see Carlo Ginzburg and Marco Ferrari, 'La colombara ha aperto gli occhi', *Quaderni Storici*, 38 (1978): 631–9 and the revised version of the same work: Ginzburg, 'The Dovecote has Opened his Eyes'.

⁵⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 119, trial against Federico Gualdi, written document by Francesco Giusto, c. 1v bis. On Nicolò Bon, see Gino Benzoni, *ad vocem*, in *DBI*.

⁵⁶ Bertelli, *Presentazione* in *Il libertinismo in Europa*, p. 12. From the thirteenth century onwards a primitive form of the sociology of religion had evolved at the University of Padua. 'There a heterodox form of Aristotelianism understood religion as *lex*, ushered in by an astral cycle established by a *legifer*, and supported by a suitable allotment of miracles ... From the

works continued to be published to some extent even following the 1559 *Index librorum prohibitorum*, largely thanks to Francesco Sansovino: ‘it was enough to simply remove his name and some of his texts continued to be circulated just the same’. Even though the 1596 *Index* changed things somewhat, in 1620 Giovan Battista Ciotti was still able to publish *Aforismi politici e militari*, while in 1630 – and again in 1648 – Marco Ginami managed to reissue *Discorsi*, ‘a more than evident sign that Machiavelli was considered to be an author guaranteed success in Venice’.⁵⁷ At the same time the libertine climate was evolving and the Accademia degli Incogniti flourished as a result under the auspices and open protection of the patriciate. Naturally, even for the period in question this does not presuppose the existence of a political line and clearly defined contradiction-free conscience within the Venetian governing class, and it is clearly difficult to detect unified trends in a context which was instead characterized by a wide variety of frequently contrasting elements to a greater extent than appearances and traditional thinking have led us to believe. The breadth of the historical experience of the Venetian patriciate was positioned within a complex interweaving of deep-rooted piety (perhaps interpreted in different ways which did not always coincide with the dictates of the Church of Rome but which were often based on rigid orthodoxy), a passion for debunking issues of sexual freedom and thought, and theoretical justification of the use of religion as an instrument of government. It is therefore difficult to establish clear relationships between these trends and presumed traditions in terms of political practice. The idea of the use of religion for political ends, indicated through many examples, might hide a situation in a constant state of flux, shown by intermittent events regarding the jurisdiction of the Republic, the alternate acceptance and rejection of the Roman Curia and the constant awareness of opportunities for adopting more open or closed policies. While this changing cautious attitude was the result of a long tradition that had been part of Venetian political culture since at least the fifteenth century, it was certainly not always expressed in a single coherent way.

early fourteenth century with Pietro d’Abano to Pietro Pomponazzi in the early sixteenth century, Padua harbored a distinct tradition that makes more understandable Machiavelli’s own ability to consider religion as an object of thought and a human phenomenon’: John M. Headley, ‘On the Rearming of Heaven: the Machiavellism of Tommaso Campanella’, *Journal of the History of the History of Ideas*, 3 (1988): 387–404, at p. 393. On the libertine use of Machiavelli, see Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, ‘Le prince des athées, Vanini et Machiavel’, in Gérald Sfez and Michel Senellart (eds), *L’enjeu Machiavel* (Paris: PUF, 2001), pp. 59–74.

⁵⁷ Sergio Bertelli and Piero Innocenti, *Bibliografia machiavelliana* (Verona: Edizioni Valdonega, 1979), pp. xlixff.

Even in cases where a gap can be identified between the religious conscience of individuals and the presentation of the Catholic faith, it was not always a question of unbelief or open dissent. Nevertheless, widespread dangerous insights circulated in a patriciate that had produced figures such as Nicolò Contarini, who in his *Historie* recognized the Ottoman Empire as a prototype of state organization, especially with regard to its attitude towards religious matters. Thanks to its wise use of integration in dealing with different types of religious unrest, Islam was able to govern many countries without infringing on individuality. The result was a religion built for the good of the Empire that had developed its stock of rites, ceremonies and forms of worship with a view to social peace. This was basically a vision that in some way touched on the Averroistic, Machiavellian and libertine idea of the political use of religion that found a fertile breeding ground in the Venetian patriciate, in this case probably linked to reading Bodin's *Les six livres de la Republique*.⁵⁸ In this sense Contarini's efforts not to involve 'the holy law given by the real God from heaven' do not seem to have been very effective, given that he spoke about religions 'which were invented by shrewd men for the simple purpose of keeping the people in place and using them to establish and expand states'. Out of the many 'legislators', Contarini thought that nobody could equal Mohammed in his ability to 'wisely structure the religion to lead the masses to him and expand the state'. After reaching adulthood, nobody was obliged to adhere to Islam and the Turks did not waste time discussing troublesome theological matters: 'they rejected the abstruse mysteries of the Trinity as matters for ignorant common people; equally they did not allow talk of incarnation'. They did experience some doctrinal divergences, but 'although the matter is awkward and difficult to resolve, nevertheless nothing is more remote from their habits than deciding it by dispute'.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ See Gaetano Cozzi, 'Il doge Nicolò Contarini. Ricerche sul patriziato veneziano agli inizi del Seicento', in Gaetano Cozzi (ed.), *Venezia barocca. Conflitti di uomini e idee nella crisi del Seicento veneziano* (Venice: Il Cardo, 1995), pp. 1–245, at pp. 173–9.

⁵⁹ See Nicolò Contarini, 'Delle istorie veneziane', in Gino Benzoni and Tiziano Zanato (eds), *Storici, politici e moralisti del Seicento* (2 vols, Milan: Ricciardi, 1982), vol. 2, pp. 135–442, at pp. 156–84. Quotations from pp. 158–60. Leonardo Donà expressed similar ideas on his return from Constantinople, especially regarding the ability of Islam to be a religion beneficial to the Empire: Federico Seneca, *Il doge Leonardo Donà. La sua vita e la sua preparazione politica prima del dogado* (Padua: Antenore, 1959), at pp. 263–321. In the 1670s would-be Doge Giovanni Sagredo was still expressing admiration for the wise astute work of Mohammed, the 'shrewd architect' who had managed to use religion to lay the foundations for such a large empire: Giovanni Sagredo, *Memorie storiche de' monarchi ottomani* (Venice: Combi e La Noù, 1688), p. 5. For Bodin's position, see Jean Bodin, *Les six livres de la Republique de Jean Bodin*, (Paris: J. Du Puys, 1577), p. 510.

Contarini's considerations undoubtedly had personal origins that were dictated by his deep-rooted piety. However, they were no less dangerous for this and if not already heretical were on the way to being so. His idea of man's total submissiveness to God's wishes rejected any need for mediation by the Church, whose only task was to coordinate the discipline of believers and so had to accept that it was subordinate to the State. Man's total submissiveness to God also came perilously close to broad adherence to the Calvinist doctrine of grace.⁶⁰

Contarini's attitude may therefore be seen as proof of both the non-marginal presence of unrest which was dangerously different from orthodoxy and cracks within the religious feelings of a social group, the Venetian patriciate, which was by no means uniform but was increasingly large and influential. His attitude was a position that could be seen as representing the theoretical continuation of the intransigence shown towards ecclesiastical demands embraced by broad sections of the patriciate. This was almost inevitably connected to the work and thinking of Paolo Sarpi, as thanks to his influence 'the social competence of theology was integrated into jurisprudence and became a constituent part of state law'.⁶¹ In this sense the broadest concept of 'Machiavellianism', which

⁶⁰ On the whole matter, see Cozzi, 'Il doge Nicolò Contarini'. Contarini's documents, drawn up from 1621, seem to refer to a *Ragguaglio* by Traiano Boccalini from 1613, *Ragguagli di Parnaso*, L. Firpo (ed.) (Bari: Laterza, 1948), Cent. 2, Ragg. 68, pp. 237–42. Gino Benzoni also underlines how Contarini seems 'to look kindly on the shrewd syncretism of Islam': Gino Benzoni, *Venezia nell'età della Controriforma* (Milan: Mursia, 1973), p. 137.

⁶¹ Frajese, *Sarpi scettico*, p. 291. The religious question in the works of Sarpi is clearly too complex to be addressed in a few lines. The question is not so much about the relationship between State and Church, worked out in the proposal of a completely spiritual Church and a wholly sovereign State – to this end, see *consulti* 44 and 55 in Paolo Sarpi, *Consulti*, vol. 1 (1606–1609) and vol. 2 (1607–1609), C. Pin (ed.) (Pisa and Rome: Istituti editoriali e poligrafici internazionali, 2001), with introductions by Corrado Pin, pp. 621–8 and 739–44 – as the Servite's personal religious experience. Start by reading Gaetano Cozzi, *Note introduttive*, in Paolo Sarpi, *Pensieri*, and Corrado Pin's introduction to *consulto* 72 (*Consulti*, pp. 840–844). See also Boris Ulianich, 'Le Epistole paoline nel pensiero e nelle opera di fra Paolo Sarpi'; Vittorio Frajese, 'Maimonide, il desiderio di immortalità e l'immagine di Dio. Problemi di interpretazione dell'insegnamento esoterico di Sarpi' and the critical review by Giuseppe Trebbi, 'Paolo Sarpi in alcune recenti interpretazioni', all in Corrado Pin (ed.), *Ripensando Paolo Sarpi* (Venice: Ateneo Veneto, 2006), pp. 73–102, 153–82 and 651–88. In addition to the position that highlights the highly personal unorthodox nature of Sarpian religiousness, which was definitely not in line with Rome but was deeply felt (Ulianich, Pin), other interpretations underline its sceptical features more openly (such as Frajese, *Sarpi scettico*) reaching a peak in the much-discussed David Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi. Between Renaissance and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), according to which 'Sarpi was irreligious and willing to contemplate the establishment of a society of moral atheists': p. 36.

was loved and hated in equal measure, and the interpretation of the worldly manifestations of religion as useful instruments for power were more matters of political practice than cultural or theoretical questions. While the Florentine secretary's works were present in most patrician libraries,⁶² it was the methods of governing above all that were assimilated by the Venetian ruling class, so much so that they became a basic element of thinking.⁶³ On the other hand, it was precisely the widespread awareness of this political culture that emerged from the practice that made it easy for observers – whether rightly or wrongly – to fit Venetian ecclesiastical politics into well-defined patterns and categories. While it was widely accepted that the ecclesiastical structure could become a political instrument, this does not mean that it was always given a positive connotation or, conversely, that the whole religion was consequently seen as an imposture. Take, for example, the opinions of the two Patuzzi brothers, who were *fenestreri* (window-makers). They expressed themselves publicly to those who frequented their *bottega*, explaining that:

there is no wonder, since patricians no longer care about honour or God, because they suppress entire religious orders to make money and sell churches and much else, as they did with the Crociferi friars of Santo Spirito. They also want parish priests to officiate every day, and they get richer with our blood and the blood of our children, and sacrifice religious people, taking away the offices of the dead.

⁶² Paul F. Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540–1605* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

⁶³ With regard to conceptions of Sarpi, Machiavelli and the Venetian patriciate: on 18 July 1741 two Dominican friars, Vincenzo Maria Colapietro and Tommaso Duodo, denounced their fellow brother Gregorio Brazzi, a fugitive from Calabria. The two were walking in the monastery of Santo Stefano in Monselice on Ascension Day at around ten o' clock, 'paying the due respects to all the Venetian nobility', when Brazzi arrived and voiced his disagreement in typically Sophist fashion. He objected by saying that 'the Venetian government is the most tyrannical and unjust in the Catholic world, being inspired by the Machiavellian theories of Frà Paolo Sarpi, more of a heretic than a Catholic, whose works are kept as reliquaries in all the Venetian noble houses; the same nobles follow his dictates as if they were oracles. However, since Sarpi is damned in Hell, so all the Venetian nobles will be his companions in those flames'. As was usual in this way of expressing opinions, he moved on to justice, which 'is always dispensed under the rule of their wives, who are all prostitutes and sell themselves to obtain whatever they like'. Unsurprisingly they listened to all this with 'nausea and abhorrence'. Vincenzo was from Puglia, but loved the Venetians, just as he said the Venetians loved people from Puglia. Instead, Duodo, as his name suggests, came from Venice: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 641, 1740–1749 file. The denunciation was published in Preto, *Persona per hora secreta*, pp. 294–5.

Despite being worse than the Turks, they want to beat them, and if we do not resolve to revolt they will dissolve even the nuns' convents, and even worse.⁶⁴

Political power therefore used religion by controlling priests to grow rich and suppressed monasteries in order to appropriate their assets. Those with power 'suck our blood every day, both of the living and the dead, us and our creatures. They undo religious orders and pay no more heed to anything'. In this case the reflections of the Patuzzis implied a revolutionary alternative: 'unless we decide to act as the people of Naples did, we will be worse off than slaves and they will also want to enjoy our women at their will', claimed one, while the other echoed him by saying that 'we should make a start, it would only take one or two people and the masses would soon follow. I would do my bit and hope for the luck that Masaniello had in Naples: I'd like to begin this evening'.⁶⁵

Views of this kind were not especially widespread, but they show that the issue of the deep-rooted fusion between practices of power and religion had expanded to be interpreted in extremely different ways. Some confirmation of this could also be found in areas of daily experience, such as justice or administration. Indeed, as a cultural system, religion is never a simple reflection of society, but a kind of model on the basis of which society itself tries to order both its religious and worldly sides.⁶⁶ In many respects the police were:

the first instrument of moral cleansing. The identification between social rules and moral laws therefore came to feature a new synthesis between politics and religion, but in contrasting terms to the previous one, since it is now in obedience to religion that the main instrument to support the constituted order is pragmatically identified.⁶⁷

Power and the ways in which it manifested itself were more evident and concrete in Venice than anywhere else and it was not difficult to notice the mechanisms that regulated the balance of power in the background. Nepotistic networks, a dense fabric of relations stretching from top-level patricians to artisans and

⁶⁴ Within the context of the abolition and redistribution of orders connected to the war of Candia, the Crociferi and the Congregazione dei Canonici Regolari were dissolved in 1656. In 1657 the monasteries of the two orders in Venice were respectively given to Minor Observants from the province of Candia and the Jesuits.

⁶⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1215, trial against the Patuzzi brothers, written document found in the denunciation box on 4 December 1657.

⁶⁶ Clifford J. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), in particular 'Religion as a Cultural System', pp. 87–125.

⁶⁷ Derosas, 'Moralità e giustizia a Venezia nel '500–'600', p. 446.

social organization that featured constant contact between individuals from different classes all created conditions where power devices were constantly visible and under discussion.

In the period in question there were approximately 1,500–1,700 patricians over 25 in the *Maggior Consiglio* (Grand Council), people whose social origins forced them to take an interest in politics.⁶⁸ They listened to reports, read dispatches and discussed diplomatic matters, although not always seriously. With their families they made up a varying percentage of between 3.4 and 4.3 per cent of the city's population,⁶⁹ supplemented by an unspecified and indefinable number of people like secretaries, notaries, writers, *gastalds* and other intermediary figures who were in daily contact with patricians through their work and who created an unbroken political chain of communication. These figures are difficult to survey and insert into professional categories, and their behaviour seems to have been difficult to control. A lot of political or diplomatic material filtered through government offices and entered writing *botteghe* to be copied, even if it was unauthorized. The plethora of secretaries and officials of different types that swarmed around the centre of power often did not manage to keep up with the demand and so outside collaborators were required. The figure of the 'secretary, or should I say *palesario*' – in the effective words of one anonymous denunciation – was therefore an important go-between for political

⁶⁸ A fundamental work for an understanding of the political involvement of the patriciate in Venice is Dorit Raines, 'Cooptazione, aggregazione e presenza al *Maggior Consiglio*: le casate del patriziato veneziano, 1297–1797', *Storia di Venezia-Rivista*, 1 (2003): 1–64 and, at greater length, Dorit Raines, *L'invention du mythe aristocratique. L'image de soi du patriciat venitien au temps de la Serenissime* (2 vols, Venice: Istituto veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2006). The following is a list of years and the corresponding number of patricians in the *Maggior Consiglio* in brackets: 1594 (1,970); 1609 (2,090); 1620 (2,000); 1631 (1,660); 1637 (1,675); 1652 (1,540); 1671 (1,590); 1683 (1,560); 1686 (1,605); 1715 (1,750); 1719 (1,710); 1726 (1,640). These figures are taken from James C. Davis, *The Decline of the Venetian Nobility as a Ruling Class* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), p. 137. Clearly, not everybody was involved in intense political activity and did not assiduously take part in votes in the *Maggior Consiglio*. According to data collected by Volker Hunecke, *Il patriziato veneziano alla fine della Repubblica. 1646–1797. Demografia, famiglia, ménage* (Rome: Jouvence, 1997), p. 417, the frequency of participation in votes fluctuated between 53 and 67 per cent. These percentages are in some way justified by the number of patricians who held other positions at the same time and were therefore involved in other governing sectors.

⁶⁹ According to data offered by Daniele Beltrami, *Storia della popolazione di Venezia dalla fine del secolo XVI alla caduta della Repubblica* (Padua: Cedam, 1954), p. 71.

matters, given that a chancellery document could be copied endlessly once it was in the hands of external copyists.⁷⁰

Despite the 'obsession' and 'religion of the secret' that had been influencing Venetian political practice since the foundation of the Consiglio di Dieci,⁷¹ strictly confidential speeches and documents regularly left the Doge's Palace to follow frequently unforeseen paths that sometimes led to public or semi-public circulation. In 1656 many documents 'of ambassadors' reports and other loose items' were reported to have disappeared from the Ducal Chancellery. They probably ended up in the hands of Giovan Battista Molinari, the owner of 'an extremely large number of different kinds of wonderful documents', who went about copying them.⁷² In 1663 the French translation of a report by Angelo Correr, the Venetian ambassador in Rome, was published in Leiden just two years after being read out in the Collegio.⁷³ It was well known that the same reports could be seen and bought in bookshops,⁷⁴ and that they were then taken to Genoa by gazetteers.⁷⁵ The huge amount of confidential information that came from all over the world through the diplomatic network was therefore able to give at least a brief summary of what was happening in France or the Levant to an audience that was theoretically limited but was in reality extremely wide-ranging and diverse. Even within the Doge's Palace, just outside the doors of the Quarantia Criminal (a criminal court with 40 judges), a *reportista*

⁷⁰ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 639, denunciation attached to report by Francesco Giupponi on 29 October 1672. The word *palesario* is a pun highlighting the fact that instead of keeping secrets, secretaries often did quite the opposite.

⁷¹ Preto, *I servizi segreti di Venezia*, pp. 55–6. The whole volume, in particular pp. 55–74, should be consulted for indepth analysis of the problem of secrets of state and the protection of them in Venice.

⁷² ASV, *Inquisitori di stato*, b. 638, report by Francesco Grimani on 27 November 1656.

⁷³ Angelo Corraro, *Relation del la cour de Rome faite en l'an 1661 au Conseil du Pregadi* (Leida: Almarigo Lorens, 1663). On the matter, see Mario Infelise, 'Le marché des informations à Venise au XVII^e siècle', in Henri Duranton and Pierre Rétat (eds), *Gazettes et information politique sous l'Ancien Régime* (Saint-Étienne: Université de Saint-Étienne, 1999), pp. 117–28. In 1657 the same ambassador told the Inquisitors of State that 'the divulgation of public affairs ... is so widespread that [it] is difficult to find something that has been kept secret. I think that the problem is that everything everyone says in the Senate circulates too freely ... The Nunzio knows everything and reports everything, gazeteers write what they hear and mix some truth among lies, and the *gazetanti* (fanatical readers of gazettes) have always discussed everything with scandalous voracity, particularly things pertaining to the Levant': ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 473, written document of 29 December 1657.

⁷⁴ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 528, note dated 18 September 1688.

⁷⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 506, document written by Consul in Genoa Giovanni Vincenti to the Inquisitors on 23 October 1672.

(newswriter) could carry out his work undisturbed.⁷⁶ Instead, the secretary of the Senato (Senate), Paolo Garzoni, was interrupted on 24 September 1652 while ‘summarizing on a piece of paper’ a confidential report that Girolamo Bragadin, who had returned from Candia, was reading out in the Senate.⁷⁷ Garzoni failed in his task and I shall ignore why he had undertaken it, but the episode shows how easy it was to penetrate the system.⁷⁸ In 1665 a *parte* (decree) of the Consiglio di Dieci needed to remember that for the patriciate it was:

a custom which had already become a terrible and monstrous habit to speak in public, and without respect in every place, about any decision, even if highly secret. Indeed, the news which for the importance of their matter should be more deeply buried in silence, attracts the most curiosity ... thus breaking the sacred deal of the oath, making it possible to look inside the practice of government, and extinguishing the decorum of public greatness.

It was necessary to batten down the hatches and remind everybody that nobody could speak about what was discussed in the Senate, the Collegio or the Consiglio di Dieci, ‘even among themselves, neither write down nor in any other way let people know or understand anything discussed, or due to be discussed, in those Consigli and Collegi, in matters of State, public service, justice and criminality: all these things must not be published but kept sealed in a profound, religious silence.’⁷⁹

⁷⁶ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 6 December 1683.

⁷⁷ ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 84, decision of 25 September 1652.

⁷⁸ This was despite the fact that for centuries the secrecy regarding procedures and the centre of power had been a fundamental element of both the myth and anti-myth of Venice. To give an idea of the less than impenetrable security, in 1676 a trial was opened by the Consiglio di Dieci not concerning a leak of written material or speeches but the disappearance from the Doge’s Palace ‘of the umbrella ... chair and other items’ belonging to Doge Alvise Contarini, things which it would have been even more difficult to take outside than documents or simple words. The trial was re-opened in 1684, although no elements had come to light in the meantime to help identify the guilty parties: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 116, 12 April 1684. The gazettes also reported the episode in detail: see, for example, ASVat, *Segr. Stato, Avvisi*, b. 118, c. 373v, *foglio di Rome* of 4 January 1676. It is thus easier to understand the theft of letters received from the ambassador in Vienna in 1708: ASVat, *Segr. Stato, Avvisi*, b. 128, 19 September 1708.

⁷⁹ ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti segrete*, b. 57, part of 5 January 1665, repeated on 15 December 1717. On Venetian political secrecy, see Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice. Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), in particular pp. 40–85.

The desired outcome was clearly too much to hope for; how could such a large social body be prevented from doing something that had been fashionable for some time and which had also been gradually spreading to others? Politics consequently became a daily social fact not only for the significant percentage of the Venetian population who worked in the field, but also for a much larger number of individuals who only had access to portrayals of it through speeches and reading the news. As a result of its constant familiar presence, political talk became totally commonplace and even social groups excluded from the direct practice of governing were intimate with it. It was not so much the depiction of power itself but of governing methods that became fairly common public property. At least for the staff in patrician houses, state secrets must have been an everyday matter, even if not fully understood, and a frequent topic of discussion, even outside in the presence of a larger audience.⁸⁰ These were not one-off or marginal cases as one might think. Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the number of domestic staff fluctuated between approximately 10,000 and 12,800, around 7–8 per cent of the city's population and 10 per cent of the so-called 'popolani' (the populace).⁸¹ The fact that the members of this sizeable professional group were in constant contact with their employers provided continual opportunities for cultural exchange and the spread of knowledge, including heterodox unrest.⁸² This was clearly often involuntary on the part of the patricians, the result of books secretly removed from libraries in homes or

⁸⁰ A good example is Zuanne Tron's manservant, who frequently met the priest from Camillo Contarini's house in St Mark's Square in 1684 to speak exclusively about what they had heard from their respective employers. Many then overheard these outdoor conversations, a diverse audience including naturally the odd spy who then reported the news: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 24 July 1684. The manservant of Doge Marcantonio Giustinian took part freely and in public, offering the news he heard being discussed: *ibid.*, report on 21 August 1684.

⁸¹ Beltrami, *Storia della popolazione di Venezia*, p. 213. I am not attempting to provide exact estimates but to suggest orders of magnitude.

⁸² In around 1690, for example, the previously mentioned Maria Desmit was able to speak to her servants about religious matters and teach them to question and reject Catholic dogma in favour of a religious confession which mixed Calvinist elements with libertine influences. Instead, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, two maids in Andrea Broio's service involved their master's wife in their discussion about the next world and ways to be saved, and were told that 'there is no Paradise, Purgatory or Hell. They only mention them in order to frighten us; we are like chickens: once we are dead, there is nothing else there'. They shrugged their shoulders and only objected with some sadness by saying that if hell, purgatory and paradise did not exist, there was no point in doing good or saying prayers: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 130, abate Menoncour file, spontaneous appearance by Caterina Sassa on 10 February 1702. It was also well known that the lady in question had little fear of God.

overheard discussions. This is what happened to Antonia, a maid for the Sarotti secretaries, who had a well-known scientific Academy in their house in the 1680s frequented by noblemen, foreigners and scholars in general. Antonia:

constantly tried to spy on those who went to the Academy, and acted as the young woman's secretary for amorous affairs, so she knew all the business of the Sarotti household, and she enjoyed hearing what was said by different people so much that she positioned herself at a little window in the room near the library, and also hid behind the bedroom doors.⁸³

There was undoubtedly no lack of opportunities for the giving and exchanging of information.⁸⁴ The communication chain that started from the patriciate involved a portrayal of political practice that at least potentially reached broad sections of the population. A similar depiction of political instruments was one of the essential elements of the development of the widespread consideration of religion as an instrument of rule, given that it could be verified at different levels in a society where the idea of politics was measured against the way it was practised on a daily basis. In other words, as soon as the new information market transformed politics, state secrets and decisions by 'the powerful' into discussion topics and the idea that people could know about them became accepted, a vast number of individuals were able to use the theory of political imposture.

⁸³ Ibid., report on 21 November 1684. On the Sarottis' Academy and the diplomatic events that led to its abolition, see Clelia Pighetti, *L'influsso scientifico di Robert Boyle nel tardo '600 italiano* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1988), pp. 127–39; Freschot, *Nouvelle relation de la ville et république de Venise*, pp. 336–8.

⁸⁴ The popularity of the game *pizia* was a sign of how familiar politics and the ruling class were to a large number of people. It basically involved guessing the names of patricians who were going to be elected to the different magistracies. Huge sums were wagered on the names and information was passed around regarding relations between the electors and potential elected members in an attempt to understand the real likelihood of each one being appointed. The governors became easily identifiable figures in a network of alliances and hostility open to interpretation. The results of the bets were checked using pieces of paper called *consegi* or *brogetti*, which listed the election results and essential information about the different positions. Used by noblemen to help them in their work, they were circulated widely among all the social classes. Therefore, while on the one hand it was possible to bet on official positions, which were elected in a city like Venice, on the other hand the bets themselves were both a sign and an instrument of the spread of political knowledge. On *brogetti*, see Dorit Raines, 'Office Seeking, *Broglia*, and the Pocket Political Guidebooks in Cinquecento and Seicento Venice', *Studi veneziani*, n.s., 22 (1991): 137–94.

Information and dissent

Political discourse

The association between politics and irreligion had a long history and was a commonly accepted fact. To this end, Benedetto Croce pointed out the problem of reconciling political science with orthodoxy: 'how was one supposed to behave ... towards science, which was developing an independent approach to religion and Christian morality, and as a result of its independence was indifferent, extraneous and sometimes even offensive and hostile?'.⁸⁵

The wise nobles of Machiavelli's dream discussed politics on their way to hell,⁸⁶ and Machiavelli was still the model unbeliever, a prototype that had survived from the Renaissance into the following century. Traiano Boccalini thought that Machiavellianism *was* political practice, presiding tacitly over the decisions and behaviour of sovereigns all over the world, even those who had never read his or Bodin's works.⁸⁷

In the mid-seventeenth century an incarnation of Pasquino on his travels in Venice complained about the huge spread of Islam and Calvinism. The Gobbo di Rialto (Hunchback of the Rialto) answered him pensively, saying that this was nothing: 'what is worse is that today the most pestiferous of all sects is growing: that of *politicians* and atheists, who care no more about divine things than beasts'. The basic identity implicitly established between 'politicians' and 'atheists' was clear: they both only considered human matters and no longer interpreted reality through God, but saw it merely as a human product of which God Himself was a part. The fact that He existed had to be exploited in terms

⁸⁵ Benedetto Croce, *Storia dell'età barocca in Italia* (Milan: Adelphi, 1993), pp. 106–7.

⁸⁶ On his deathbed the Florentine apparently had a dream about a long procession of men in bad condition, dressed in rags and visibly suffering. On questioning them he discovered that they were the saintly and blessed on their way to heaven. He then saw a group of solemnly dressed men behaving in a grave manner and discussing political issues. Among them he recognized philosophers and historians from antiquity. When he plucked up the courage to ask them where they were going, they told him that they were damned and were on their way to hell. On waking up, Machiavelli told the friends who were helping him that, all things considered, without hesitation he would rather go to hell, where he could have interesting discussions with great men, than heaven, where he would undoubtedly get bored: Gennaro Sasso, 'Il "celebrato sogno" di Machiavelli' and 'Paralipomeni al "sogno di Machiavelli"', both in Gennaro Sasso, *Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi* (4 vols, Milan: Ricciardi, 1998), vol. 3, pp. 211–94 and vol. 4, pp. 325–60; Maurizio Viroli, *Il sorriso di Niccolò. Storia di Machiavelli* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2000), p. 3.

⁸⁷ Traiano Boccalini was referring to Muslims: *Ragguagli di Parnaso*, Cent. I, Ragg. 32.

of social control and governing the people.⁸⁸ However, in seventeenth-century parlance ‘politicians’ were not only those who worked in politics but also those who were interested in it and kept themselves constantly informed about ‘the world’s successes’. For example, ‘piazza e politicisti’ was the definition used by spy Camillo Badoer in 1681 to refer to a broad section of the public from different social classes that were curious about state secrets and made an effort to interpret all aspects of their world, including religion, in wholly political terms.⁸⁹

It should be said that Venice was by no means an exception; there was a general trend of political discussion, which had already started to take a firm hold in the first half of the seventeenth century and attracted the sarcasm of observers at the time.⁹⁰ According to Ludovico Zuccolo, already in the first 20 years of the century, barbers ‘and the other most despicable craftsmen discuss and question the reason of State in *botteghe* and meeting-places and make out that they know which things are done for reasons of state and which are not.’⁹¹ Through the words of a somewhat distorted Apollo, Traiano Boccalini instead observed how the ‘surely infernal doctrine, that was sown by Tacitus the farmer, only for the benefit of princes, now is greedily embraced even by private individuals. Tacitus, who previously was only regarded as fitting for princes, is now so publicly in everyone’s hands that even shopkeepers and porters do not display knowledge of any other science than the reason of State. The world is full of such spoil-trade politicians, with much mockery from great men.’⁹² Capaccio, a Neapolitan, produced this vivid description in 1634:

The world has created this reason of State ... to make people lose their wit. It is mixed with all human affairs and with all matters, frivolous or serious, useful or harmful, significant or playful; it is always on people’s lips: they reason about it in the kitchen, cry it out in the brothel, the nobility has it as a ceremony, plebeians

⁸⁸ ASV, *Miscellanea atti diversi-Manoscritti*, b. 65, *Del Pasquino esiliato. Parlata prima. Pasquino et il Gobbo di Rialto*. The pasquinade can be dated to the 1650s through its internal references.

⁸⁹ The term ‘politichisti’ was often used by Badoer to define the group of people who read gazettes or heard them being read out and then discussed them, sometimes heatedly. See, for example, ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 567, report on 8 September 1681.

⁹⁰ There are some important passages in Ezio Raimondi, ‘Tra novellisti e avvisi’, in Pierangelo Bellettini, Rosaria Campioni and Zita Zanardi (eds), *Una città in piazza. Comunicazione e vita quotidiana a Bologna tra Cinque e Seicento* (Bologna: Compositori, 2000), pp. 11–14. In this respect Brendan Dooley defined the Seicento as ‘an age of nascent information media, a century of emerging public opinion’: Dooley, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

⁹¹ Ludovico Zuccolo, ‘Della ragione di Stato’, in Benedetto Croce and Santino Caramella (eds), *Politici e moralisti del Seicento*, (Bari: Laterza, 1930), p. 29.

⁹² Boccalini, *Ragguagli di Parnaso*, Cent. I, Ragg. 86, pp. 314–15.

make themselves important out of it, and even astrologers claim that heavens move by reason of State.⁹³

As Rosario Villari wrote, ‘discussion of the reason of State reached ... a peak of popularity in the first half of the seventeenth century’.⁹⁴ The phenomenon was not limited to large cities – in small cities on the Venetian mainland there are many references to ‘a rustic-artisan version of mealtime conversations in Don Rodrigo’s castle’⁹⁵ – but it was even more common in Venice, a city characterized by the quality of its infrastructure and the ability to obtain important information. In this respect it was probably the leading city in Italy together with Rome and among the top cities in Europe.⁹⁶ As Vittorio Siri put it, in Venice more than anywhere else ‘you can see a multitude of individuals and *cavalieri* who have been ambassadors to all the courts of Europe, and among the patricians no other exercise is practiced than civil prudence. Here dwell people of very fine wit and experienced in political affairs’.⁹⁷ A well-organized postal system, intense mobility among people of different origins, a lively market for news and its role as an obligatory stop-off point between Christian Europe and the Ottoman world all made Venice the ideal place for acquiring, creating, adapting and selling information. In addition to the usual channels of retrieval, the speed of circulation⁹⁸ and opportunities to pick up news outside the city increased as a result of the network formed by the Jewish community and the dense web of contacts created by Jewish merchants all over Europe. During the seventeenth century, for example, Spanish ambassadors in Venice saw the Ghetto as a privileged centre for procuring important news. As a result, they

⁹³ Giulio Cesare Capaccio, *Il forastiero* (Naples, 1634), quoted in Croce, *Storia dell’età barocca in Italia*, pp. 107–8.

⁹⁴ Rosario Villari, *Elogio della dissimulazione. La lotta politica nel Seicento* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1987), p. 27.

⁹⁵ Gigi Corazzol, *Cineografo di banditi su sfondo di monti. Feltre 1634–1642* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 1997), p. 65.

⁹⁶ On this matter, see Stéphane Haffemayer, ‘La géographie de l’information dans la Gazette de Renaudot de 1647 à 1663’, in Duranton and Rétat (eds), *Gazettes et information politique sous l’Ancien Régime*, pp. 21–31.

⁹⁷ Vittorio Siri, *Il Mercurio overo storia de’ tempi correnti* (15 vols, Casale: per Christoforo della Casa, 1645–1682), vol. 2.

⁹⁸ On this matter, see Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th–18th Century. Vol. I: Structures of Everyday Life* (London: HarperCollins, 1981). For the early fifteenth century Braudel uses data collected by Pierre Sardella, *Nouvelles et spéculations à Venise au début du XVI siècle* (Paris: A. Colin, 1948), based largely on *Diarii* by Marin Sanudo, while for the following two centuries he uses the dates of Venetian gazettes kept in the Record Office in London.

always kept in frequent contact with Jewish merchants, who guaranteed a constant and extremely fast influx of information. As Girolamo Brusoni wrote in 1670, they were 'very well informed about matters in the world because of the contacts that they have in different places' and were therefore able to provide 'special announcements and news' as well as 'some intelligence about the affairs of princes'.⁹⁹ For example, it seems that the network of the Jewish community and merchants was responsible for bringing printed 'announcements' by fellow Jew Castro Tartas from Amsterdam.¹⁰⁰ Israel Conegliano, a doctor, used this network to receive news in advance from Hungary or Constantinople.¹⁰¹

Although Venice rarely came to international attention anymore, except for its rearguard battles with the Turks, it remained a major centre for news consumption. The city was covered by an extensive information network, which was even more tightly knit in places such as the Rialto, the Embassy district in Cannaregio and the areas around the Doge's Palace and the post office in San Moisè.¹⁰² Furthermore, first in the middle of the century and then again in the 1680s Venice was swamped by a torrent of newspapers, gazettes, reports and all kinds of different writing about current affairs.¹⁰³ There was a sudden increase in interest in world events and relations between states, first as a result of the Turkish assault on Candia and then following the Morean War, in which it seemed that the survival of the Christian West was at stake. There was an incredibly popular following for the material which reported what was happening on the front, with the necessary accompaniment of political considerations regarding the different attitudes adopted by countries irrespective of whether they were involved in the conflict or not. There was an increase in sources, discussions, opportunities for debate and arguments to develop. Venice was at the forefront of conflicts of interest at a European level. Grand politics emerged from events on the battlefields, reflecting the decisions made by those in power which were sometimes predictable, sometimes intelligible and sometimes neither. Reasoning was now carried out on the basis of dynamics between states and global relations. People felt they could find out everything that was happening in the Court of France, imperial electors were frequently mentioned in discussions and the long-

⁹⁹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 558, reports by Girolamo Brusoni on 18 January and 6 February 1670.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 591, reports by Israel Conegliano from 1687 to 1699.

¹⁰² For a complete presentation of the world of information in Venice, see Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*.

¹⁰³ Mario Infelise, 'La guerra, le nuove, i curiosi. I giornali militari negli anni della Lega contro il Turco (1683–1690)', in Antonella Bilotto, Piero Del Negro and Cesare Mozzarelli (eds), *I Farnese: corti, guerra e nobiltà in antico regime* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1997), pp. 321–48.

term strategies of the King of Spain seemed clear, or least accessible to those that could read them.

The change in the way in which the world was being represented became evident between the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries and then definitive in the second half of the latter century. Material taken from newspapers, gazettes, *mercuri* and oral or written accounts laid the foundations for a large-scale vision that was more open and critical, at least in its initial stages.¹⁰⁴ There had been a decisive change in the relationship between politics – or depictions of politics – and marginal sectors of the population, represented by increasingly large and socially varied groups excluded from the administration of power but interested in politics and able to speak about it. The form of the politics in question was often simplified, however, and considered in the context of sudden outbreaks of wars and open conflicts. Discussions often went no further than comparisons of the best ways to mobilize armies, although they sometimes developed to touch a wider range of subjects. They were not intended to be merely exercises in military strategy but lessons in diplomatic technique or use of the reason of State, or more simply a means of social self-promotion. In this light, the issue is not so much to establish how many people were effectively aware of the facts, or even to measure to what extent sources corresponded to the truth. The real question is what these people thought they knew, made it seem that they knew or found appropriate to discuss. One element to take into account here was the inevitable and indefinable gap between a text and an understanding of it: Gregorio Leti, a budding reader response theorist, observed in 1666 that what was found written in gazettes and what one wanted to read were two different things, given that ‘people read them as they are written, but interpret them as they like’.¹⁰⁵ Gazettes and journals were clearly not the only material instruments for spreading news; a kind of popular education in matters of state could also be found in the wide-reaching distribution of satirical

¹⁰⁴ Daniel Woolf feels that the results of the spread of political information included an affirmation of the sense of simultaneous events, the awareness of being part of a world in which other people were living at the same time in distant or unknown places. The consequence was a marked change in the perception of the present as a period of time rather than an instant. ‘News had not, of course, displaced history as a subject of discussion. But it had definitively established the present as a zone of activity, as narratable as the past, but distinguishable from it, and thereby constructed a public space within which events could enjoy their ephemeral life before slipping into the maw of history’: Woolf, ‘News, History and the Construction of the Present in Early Modern England’, p. 98. See now Brendan Dooley (ed.), *The Dissemination of News and the Emergence of Contemporaneity in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010).

¹⁰⁵ Gregorio Leti, *Dialoghi politici o vero la politica che usano in questi tempi i prencipi e repubbliche italiane per conservare li loro stati e signorie* (Rome: Francesco Moneta, 1666).

works in prose or verse, which in any case often formed part of the repertoire of gazetteers, who often produced them in their *botteghe*.¹⁰⁶

Communicating news orally was also common practice in a city like Venice, where all one had to do to keep up to date was go out to a square or *bottega* and listen. In addition to speeches, stories and songs, gazettes were read aloud in places frequented by people from every social sector and then discussed at length.¹⁰⁷ The oral communication of news in this way made it more likely for a single copy to reach a potentially very large number of listeners, including some illiterate ones.¹⁰⁸ Professionals in the information sector were well aware of these opportunities for spreading news well beyond the scope of the written page. Compilers of gazettes, reports and stories in general were as much a part of oral culture as of written culture and, like the writers of songs and satirical poems, knew that their work was destined to be divulged equally through both means.¹⁰⁹ In this way information was constantly reiterated in discussions

¹⁰⁶ Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*, p. 157. See an example in ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 650, report by an informer at the Nunciature on 9 November 1692. In general, texts written in rhyme were popular: after being put up on walls and circulated in handwritten form, a 1695 defamatory composition against a rector from Verona had 'become ... public entertainment for youngsters in song'. There were references to other similar songs at the same time: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 122, 15 December 1695.

¹⁰⁷ As an eighteenth-century text said, 'songs, stories, gazettes, reports, speeches' were part of 'those ... little publications of not even three sheets and which circulate among the common people and the minority of insurgents, which are sung, talked about and sold in the street and in St Mark's Square': ASV, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, b. 361, anonymous undated written document. Alternatively or additionally, gazetteers themselves sometimes told the news orally in advance, like reporter Angelo Torri in the early eighteenth century, who gave political exclusives to people in the *botteghe* of Santa Fosca: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 640, anonymous report on 26 December 1704.

¹⁰⁸ Children were often seen 'shouting stories and affairs around St Mark's'. In general sales took place both from stands and by going around 'crying them out in Saint Mark's and at the Rialto'. If news turned out to be 'rancid', in the sense that it had been overtaken by events or publicly denied, the value of the publications diminished. In such a case the seller did not stop his work but fixed the price in order to cover costs and unsold copies were usually distributed among *putelli* (children), who sold them around the city 'crying them out': ASV, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, b. 366, trial against Giovanni Batti, deposition by Giovanni on 11 September 1684.

¹⁰⁹ Brendan Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism. Experience and Doubt in Early Modern Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 15. An interesting circular mechanism was often triggered whereby the products of discussions and exchanges in public places became part of new written accounts, which in turn influenced the formation and structure of discourse. With regard to the complex way in which the dynamics of rumours worked, see Fox, 'Rumour, News and Popular Opinion in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England'. When receiving some news in a conversation, each person could assess how

in public places, both through private conversations and in knots or ‘*bozzoli*’ (literally, cocoons).¹¹⁰ With regard to the latter, it is well known how ‘the hard-and-fast law of *bozzoli* means that whenever a member breaks off, he forms another one, which then expands and “fertilizes” others, in a dizzying geometric progression.’¹¹¹ Joseph Addison thus felt it was plausible to reach a much higher number of people than he would through direct readers and printed copies alone. He established a minimum figure of 20 people for each copy of his *The Spectator* and with sales of around 3,000, he was therefore aiming at about 60,000 users.¹¹²

Thanks to the interplay between different means of circulation, ‘news’ was an ongoing widely established presence in Venetian society which increased the number of opportunities for interaction and exchanges of opinion. People developed an interest in far-off events which may not have had an immediate impact on their lives but which were interesting first of all because – if put into perspective – there could always be repercussions. They were also a good subject

reliable it was from the teller’s gestures, facial expressions or intonation. At the very least, one could understand whether someone believed what they were saying or not. ‘It is no wonder, then, that early modern people long preferred to have their news by mouth when possible’: Woolf, ‘News, History and the Construction of the Present’, p. 92.

¹¹⁰ ‘The thirst for news was slaked from a variety of fountainheads, among them conversation, official communication, eavesdropping, public debate, acting, private correspondence, social gatherings, observation, and the printed and written word. All human faculties were involved in the absorption and digestion of news’: Dooley and Barron (eds), *The Politics of Information*, p. 17.

¹¹¹ Aldo Pettenella, *Storie Euganee* (Verona: Cierre Edizioni, 2002), p. 218.

¹¹² ‘My publisher tells me, that there are already three thousand of them [papers] distributed every day: so that if I allow twenty readers to every paper, which I took upon as a modest computation, I may reckon about threescore thousand disciples in London and Westminster’: Addison, *The Spectator*, vol. 1, n. 10, Monday, 12 March 1711, p. 41. Written material in general and the spoken word were sometimes supplemented by figurative representations such as the large painting displayed in October 1686 in the square of San Cassian, ‘where there is a painting of the honourable Morosini’s ship, aboard which those French soldiers mutinied to betray it and steal the money the fleet was carrying, a constant flow of people who on seeing it launched invective against the French, so much so that these exact words are written on the frame of the painting: great betrayal, great iniquity, and then people added the phrase *wicked French traitors*’: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 13 October 1686. ‘The products of the new political information business were unprecedented in quantity as they were various in kind. Manuscripts, newsletters and printed handbills, occasional newsbooks and printed newspapers, poetry and prose; there seems to be no reason not to refer to this material as the journalism of the time’: Dooley, ‘Introduction’, p. 3. On visual representations of news, see Andrew Sawyer, ‘Medium and Message. Political Prints in the Dutch Republic, 1568–1632’, in Judith Pollmann and Andrew Spicer (eds), *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Early Modern Netherlands* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 163–87.

matter for discussion, as well as for practising and demonstrating personal analysis and prediction skills and showing off the extent of one's knowledge. The political climate also clearly made a major contribution in determining the way in which news was received and the impact this had on public opinion, as most effects were essentially predictable. Nevertheless, in many respects this passion for the news was an eccentric phenomenon. With time, satire against *nouvellistes* (both newswriters and readers) or *geniali* (partizans) became a kind of literary genre in itself, a polemical topos whose terms are summarized well by the Marquis d'Argens:

I really don't think that the crowd could be pushed any further than those people do. It isn't surprising, given that their spirits are in a permanent state of agitation. They are party to everything that happens in Europe. They are gripped by the fate of princes. They become restless and tormented about things which have nothing to do with them. Their happiness or sadness depends on the news in gazettes. On Monday and Tuesday they look like criminals waiting to be pardoned or condemned. They despair over whether the Turks have been defeated or whether the Ottoman army have made advances. They complain about the losses of the Ottoman empire as if they were pashas or viziers who had to pay for it with their heads or reimburse costs out of their own pockets. While some despair, others rejoice. In Paris they are as happy and joyful as Prince Eugene after he conquered the city of Belgrade.¹¹³

Similar works of satire cannot have been appreciably different from reality. Indeed, records give the impression that they limited themselves to portraying a world of attitudes, rumours and gestures which was mostly fairly concrete and only exaggerated certain details.¹¹⁴ For example, in many respects – at least from the 1680s onwards – the depiction of the people of Paris supplied by d'Argens reflected the situation in Venice as described by the informers who worked

¹¹³ *Lettres cabalistiques, ou correspondance philosophique, historique, et critique, entre deux cabalistes, divers esprits élémentaires, et le seigneur Astaroth* (2 vols, La Haye, Pierre Paupie, 1787–1788), at vol. 2, p. 90, letter 42: 'Le cabaliste Abukibak, à son ancien disciple Ben Kiber.'

¹¹⁴ See, for example, the satire by Bartolomeo Dotti *Ai Novellisti*, written during the War of the Spanish Succession, in Bartolomeo Dotti, *Satire* (Geneva: Cramer, 1757), pp. 187–99, but there is a very long list, with dozens of examples from Garzoni to Montesquieu. There is one especially effective satire by Joseph Addison in n. 155 of *The Tatler* on 6 April 1710. See *The Tatler*, edited with introduction and notes by G.A. Aitken (3 vols, New York: Hadley and Mathews – London: Duckworth and Co., 1899), vol. 3, pp. 218–22. See also the late seventeenth-century incisions by Giuseppe Maria Mitelli from Bologna, reported in Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*, pp. 208–11.

for the Inquisitors of State, whose main worries, however, were certainly not narrative-based. In September 1687 at the *Vigilanza spezieria* near the Procuratie in St Mark's Square:

there was an uproar, because a certain Lorenzo Valmaggi, a Florentine, told the owner of the aforementioned spice shop – a chap called Vincenzo – that he was a reckless shameful pig, because the apothecary had stated publicly in front of many gentlemen who were in his bottega that the dukes of Lorraine and Bavaria had been foolhardy to cross the Drava, given that they had been forced to flee like a herd of pigs even though there were 80,000 of them against a few Turks. And that they were strange, haughty and ignorant, along with other dreadful words against the aforementioned dukes and other imperial princes.¹¹⁵

The evolution of political information, which blossomed in the mid-seventeenth century as a result of – or at the same time as – the increase in the number of opportunities for discussion and interaction, therefore gave rise to a partly new form of sociability based on adherence to political positions and polemical liveliness, which made the following description more or less the norm:

as a result of discussing the news ... groups and cliques of people can be seen who take one or the other side, which in St Mark's Square can sometimes even be made up of hundreds of people. Because of the spread of different news, serious quarrels, hostility, insults and even aggression can develop among these groups, sometimes ending in blows, slaps and punches. For example, yesterday evening two old men – Berto, a fruit seller in Calle della Testa and another bottegaio (shopkeeper) – came to blows while they were arguing about the capture of Melisso, about which they had read different accounts. What I want to say ... is that after the fight, I heard that those who had taken sides with one or the other agreed to help their companions in future, which may give rise to disorder. This state of affairs also leads to great freedom of speech. One day I heard Bealsiano, a cavalryman and subject of this Republic, extol the virtues of the King of France and express the wish that his kingdom extended to Venice. On the contrary, Don Giovanni Zisola a priest from San Marco, spoke ill of the King of France. Warned by Bealsiano, the priest replied: that he should go and [omitted] this face of [omitted], he can kiss my arse because I'm safe under the protection of St Mark.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 11 September 1687.

¹¹⁶ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, report by Fra' Costantino on 19 December 1676. Cases of controversies, explicit or otherwise, between partisans were frequently signalled by informers working for the Inquisitors of State, who were also interested in the phenomenon because of the repercussions it could have on public order. To give two more examples, on

Beyond political dialectics and controversies of a diplomatic, war-related and tactical nature, the strength of the influence of news on large sections of the Venetian population can be measured on the basis of many different indicators. For example, towards the end of July 1687 printed signs appeared in *botteghe*, next to bridges and on walls in the busiest streets. They were invitations to an Academy meeting to be held in the house of the nobleman Quintiliano Rezzonico in Santa Sofia on 30 July, at which another nobleman, Farsetti, was going to speak about a somewhat delicate topic: 'whether winning or losing the war was better for the Republic'. Attendance was impressive and some gazettes carried stories about the Academy.¹¹⁷ However, political awareness, or at least an embryonic form of it, was also shown by the ways in which popular fury was expressed. In 1682 Pietro Marchesi, the *residente* of Mantua, saw bulls passing by in front of his residence. There was nothing unusual about this, as butchers were taking them to be slaughtered. They also frequently took the route past the Spanish and French embassies and nobody had ever complained about it. On 2 April 1682, however, Marchesi decided that it was unacceptable, perhaps because he wanted to give a signal to the Republic, and threats were soon followed by actions and the herders were attacked by his servants. As this all took place on the move and the desired results were not achieved, he decided to take it further and go to the butchers' homes. A butcher's boy was killed in the ensuing events. The news spread and the district of Cannaregio rose up in anger. Their fury, however, was strangely argumentative in nature. They shouted to each other repeatedly that the street belonged to everybody and then in front of the diplomat's house they shouted that he wanted to take away Venice's freedom and that they knew full well that the Duke of Mantua, a French ally, wanted to declare war on the Republic.¹¹⁸

27 November 1705 an anonymous informer reported that 'the city is divided into factions over this war, and satire can be read in some *botteghe*'. Instead, on 29 August 1705 he praised a *reportista* because 'as a result of altercations between the partisans, who caused a fight yesterday, Father Piero, who writes gazettes, has had to close his bottega, a very wise decision': ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 640. 'Information sharpened conflicts; it furnished new venues for symbolic interaction of every type. It even inspired a category of thought about itself, in terms of the earliest what we might call media theory': Dooley, 'Introduction', p. 8.

¹¹⁷ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, reports by Camillo Badoer on 30 July and 5 August 1687.

¹¹⁸ The Resident was quite surprised by the reaction: he spoke to the French ambassador about it and concluded that he would shoot anyone who came too close with an arquebus. The account is in ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 567, report by Onorato Castelnovo on 2 April 1682. It must be said that Marchesi did little to make himself popular in the years he spent in Venice, first as a simple agent and then as Resident: the first time he went to the Collegio in the role of Resident 'to obtain an audience, he was made to wait for two hours in the

All things considered, it was not so extraordinary that news and information shaped popular anger so that it was expressed in terms of international politics. It was the predictable result of the hunger for news and involvement in state secrets, even if practised from outside, that affected more or less everyone.¹¹⁹ Some were, however, more affected than others. In the late 1680s Lelio Muneghina, a canon, was so passionate about news that he built a personal obsession around developments in the Morean War, with which he always kept up to date. Shut off in a cell in the monastery of the Canons Regular of San Salvatore di Candiana and bombarded with news of battles during the war, he eventually built a miniature fort in his cell. The remains of a low wall served as a bastion and above this 'he used a tobacco handkerchief as a flag, and said that the wall marked the furthest extent of his fortifications', supplemented by an otherwise unexplained 'trapdoor ... so that nobody could enter without running the risk of seriously injuring the top of his head'. It was a fortress 'that he had equipped well ... with arms and food, which he did not want to surrender, while he could sustain and defend it, and that if he was lacking supplies and the power to support himself he would send his dragoman to collect the terms of peace, even to the detriment of his authority and glorious reputation'. This reputation

antechamber. In the meantime all the members of the Collegio left by the secret door. Once they had all left, at the sound of the bell he was let in and found nobody, and the usher told him that he should learn his lesson': ASMN, *Archivio Gonzaga*, b. 1582, letter from Resident Giovan Francesco Ferrari to the Secretary of State on 24 April 1688. He was called back to Mantua in June 1686: ASV, *Senato, Dispacci Roma*, f. 199, 22 and 29 June 1686, cc. 529r and 538r.

¹¹⁹ For an example of a political discussion between a baker, a *bottega* boy, a priest and a spy who worked for the Inquistors of State in Burano, see ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1215, account of 29 January 1658: 'on Thursday evening ... I got on the boat in San Moisè and went to my home on Burano, the place where I live, and I arrived there at about four o' clock at night, I disembarked straight away and went to relax for an hour or so in the company of Giacomo Almeni, a priest on Burano, where I met reverend Antonio Duvonich, a Schiavone priest, who also lives on Burano, and who was talking to Mr Almeni, and Pietro Locatelli, the said Mr Giacomo's *bottega* boy. After a lot of discussion Pietro asked me where I had been until that time, and I answered him that I had come from Venice as my business had taken me there. He asked me if I had any news from Venice and I answered none, because I mind my own business. And he said to me: I have some news. Today the parish priest from Sant'Angelo di Mazorbo was here and said that our honourable ambassador in Rome had gone for an audience with his Holiness and that he explained the needs of the Venetian Republic, to which his Holiness was not very well disposed, telling our honourable ambassador that he has already done too much for the Republic, having shed blood, and that besides in the future he does not want to weaken his state to enrich other states and that he didn't want to hear any more. He then gave him his blessing and turned his back on our ambassador'.

was built on letting his beard grow 'Turkish style', wearing a homemade turban and calling himself 'Prince Paconio', a name he even used to sign his letters.¹²⁰

In terms of the development of a structured form of dissent, some items of news clearly had an immediate effect, which was partly foreseen; numerous reports arrived from Rome detailing scandals, the trade in sex and immoral episodes involving cardinals, senior prelates and even popes. In the form of handwritten gazettes, reports, pasquinades and tales enriched to varying degrees by the teller, these depictions of the Papal Curia did not help the idea of a pure just Church uniformly committed to saving souls.¹²¹ There was an increase in the number of people who shared the general opinion of the Savoyan ambassador in Rome, Filiberto Gerardo from Verrua, about the Council of Trent. After learning about events from a true believer, he wrote at the end of the sixteenth century that 'the Council is like a cake, sweet and tasty when it is made, but nauseating when seen being made'. Although its aim of reforming the Church was a just one, he felt that the Council was 'a disgusting thing to

¹²⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, trial against Fra' Lelio Muneghina, defence articles presented by the lawyer Giovan Domenico Fantini, undated but dating back to 1690. A trial had been opened against Lelio for heretical blasphemy, but following a series of expert reports the Sant'Uffizio judged him to be 'simple' and he was entrusted to the care of his superiors, although he had asked insistently to be sentenced to row on a galley in armed service: *ibid.*, session of 8 September 1690. In September 1690 he was thus entrusted to the leaders of his order so that they could look after him inside a monastery, with the proviso not to let him out without the approval of the Congregazione del Sant'Uffizio in Rome: ACDF, S.O., *Decreta 1690*, 22 August 1690, cc. 264r–v. They sent him to Ferrara, where he remained for some time. On 10 September 1692 the Congregazione finally decided to pardon him and let him return to the Venetian territories, with a medical report which said it was necessary for him to go 'ut accipienda medicamenta dicta li fanghi di Padova': ACDF, S.O., *Decreta 1692*, 10 September and 1 October 1692, c. 328v. They were too late though and when they went to tell him the news on around 15 September, they found his cell empty. He had escaped from the monastery by himself, perhaps in order to join the war as he had always wanted to. Nobody heard anything more about him. See Federico Barbierato, 'Immaginarsi la guerra: la follia di Fra' Lelio Muneghina', in Mario Infelise and Anastasia Stouraiti (eds), *Venezia e la guerra di Morea. Guerra, politica e cultura alla fine del '600*, (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2005), pp. 232–41.

¹²¹ Measures were taken in Rome in 1596 to prevent people from writing against the clergy, but the ban was destined to be ignored: Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*, p. 156. On the evolution of pasquinades and defamatory anti-curial writing, see Antonio Rotondò, 'Anticristo e Chiesa romana. Diffusione e metamorfosi d'un libello antiromano del Cinquecento', in Antonio Rotondò (ed.), *Forme e destinazione del messaggio religioso. Aspetti della propaganda religiosa del Cinquecento* (Florence: Olschki, 1991) and now above all Niccoli, *Rinascimento anticlericale*.

see happen because of the combination of human practices'.¹²² As soon as this type of observation and information left the tight-knit circle of diplomatic correspondence and became a common topic of conversation, something which happened frequently, the information took on a largely anti-curial nature, and even though the main targets were specific historical figures, it often discredited the whole ecclesiastical institution. Even the cake in the end seemed 'nauseating'. 'Consider, if you will, that justice is controlled by papalists, who force us friars to observe celibacy, while they frequent whores. They could at least let us take a wife', concluded Fra' Tommaso Onorio in 1651,¹²³ while in 1687 Camillo Badoer noted that 'the terrible examples set by the Holy See lead to an increase in complaints and sins'.¹²⁴

This attitude towards the clergy – with the consequent tendency to take a familiar irreverent approach to sacred matters – belonged to the long Italian tradition of anti-clericalism that had somehow gained in strength as a result of Reformation propaganda and the brusque Catholic reaction at the Council of Trent. While during the sixteenth century 'the practice of anti-clerical infamy had got a foothold and was widely used for Reformation propaganda' with special intensity in the Republic,¹²⁵ it is clear that the news market had the effect of providing an already widespread opinion with new arguments. The pope was often presented and seen as a normal man, sometimes a corrupt despotic fraud and sometimes timorous and selfish, someone who 'does not like to assume commitments, because he is most interested in living'.¹²⁶ Political news about agreements, treaties and intrigues did little to strengthen the spiritual image of pontiffs and cardinals, who were increasingly considered to be governors that used religion as a means of control, thus making them increasingly similar to other sovereigns.¹²⁷ There was also the inescapable fact that the pope was a legislator, governor and priest all at the same time just like Moses, the prototype

¹²² Quoted in Niccoli, *La vita religiosa nell'Italia moderna*, p. 123.

¹²³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 106, Caterina Tordana file, trial against Fra' Tommaso Onorio, spontaneous appearance by Fra' Angelo Maria on 15 February 1651.

¹²⁴ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 20 September 1687.

¹²⁵ Niccoli, *Rinascimento anticlericale*, pp. 106–9.

¹²⁶ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 603, report by Giovan Antonio Gasparini on 8 August 1699.

¹²⁷ Besides, as Paolo Paruta noted in 1595, referring to the political centralization work desired by Sixtus V, the papal authority 'increasingly expanded to become like the monarchy': Eugenio Albèri (ed.), *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato* (15 vols, Florence: Società Editrice Fiorentina, 1857), vol. 2.4, p. 413. The underlying ambiguity between a spiritual idea of the administration of the Church and the more earthly aspects of the papacy – not dissimilar from those of any other monarchy – ended up being resolved by observers who favoured the latter.

of the impostor-legislator in the libertine critique. In summary, the pontiff was no longer seen as the Antichrist of Reformation polemics, but more simply as a politician.

To give just one example, even a century earlier Julius II was seen as the Warrior Pope with more than a passing interest in worldly matters and a lack of scruples, things for which he was lambasted in pasquinades.¹²⁸ During the seventeenth century the forms and features of the pasquinades completed their evolutionary process by taking on increasingly large areas in a major humanization process involving figures who should have instead appeared in their holy dimension, or at least been put forward as immaculate examples as much as possible. The 'ideological erosion' of the figure of the Church carried out in gazettes and the publication of pamphlets by the same groups followed a trend leading to the desacralization of curials, which was partly similar to that noted by Robert Darnton with regard to French rulers in the eighteenth century before the Revolution.¹²⁹ They became accessible, talked-about figures, who might have been more powerful but were not better as a result. As he could be spoken about in the same way as natural and social phenomena, the pontiff sometimes came across as a sovereign like any other, an unscrupulous manipulator of the reason of State or a short-sighted politician using his spiritual tools as arms in international conflicts. At the beginning of the 1680s a leaflet, which was widely distributed at all levels as it was illustrated, showed the Turks and the French cutting the world in two and sharing it out, the Emperor busy playing the virginals, Venice clasping a musket without a fuse, Genoa fleeing in nothing but a shirt and Spain dozing, unwilling to wake up. Surrounded by all this, the pope could find nothing better to do than dispense indulgences.¹³⁰ Political questions regarding the papacy were thus considered to be of greater interest.

The 'atheist Truth'

The arrival of Cardinal d'Estrées must have been expected following news of the worsening of the Gallican question. In the winter of 1680 the King of France's Councillor did not go unnoticed as he passed through Padua and Venice on his way to Rome with a diplomatic message from Louis XIV. The trip to Rome

¹²⁸ For these aspects and the general climate of the period, not only with regard to Julius II, see Niccoli, *Rinascimento anticlericale*.

¹²⁹ See, for example, Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), in particular 'The High Enlightenment and the Low-Life of Literature' (pp. 1–40).

¹³⁰ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, enclosed with the report by Camillo Badoer on 25 April 1683.

heralded the rupture between the papacy and the French. Tension had been rising for several years around the well-known problem of the *Régale*, a common habit in northern bishoprics whereby the King could replace a deceased bishop to enjoy the revenue from the vacant position and appoint the holders of benefits unrelated to the care of souls. The ongoing clash started in 1673 and continued in fits and starts. Innocent XI's rise to the papal throne in 1676 marked a turning point and he sent three briefs (in 1678, 1679 and 1680) to dissuade Louis XIV from continuing this policy. The French clergy always sided with the King against the pontiff, speaking of 'threats'. During 1680, the idea of calling an assembly of the French clergy gained ground, supported by none other than d'Estrées.¹³¹

The cardinal was travelling to Rome as the bearer of this news, which was a foretaste of four articles that appeared in *Déclaration du clergé de France sur la puissance ecclésiastique* in February 1682. Unsurprisingly, the Gallican principles for which he acted as a spokesman were greeted favourably in the Republic by groups that had jealously guarded jurisdictional principles through various vicissitudes.¹³² On the other hand, the Gallicans' main opponent in Rome was the Venetian Cardinal Ottoboni, the future Pope Alexander VIII, whose obstinate uncompromising determination in defending Roman prerogatives had pushed Louis XIV to turn to the Venetian government, asking for intervention to moderate the cardinal's advice. The matter therefore aroused keen interest in the Serenissima.¹³³

Meanwhile, the French cardinal's arrival in Rome was eagerly awaited and the delay was attributed to the apparition of a comet. Observers felt that the cardinal could have interpreted it as a sign of the imminent death of the pope, causing him to wait and see what would happen.¹³⁴ When he went to Padua, the

¹³¹ There is an extensive bibliography on the Gallican question. Useful as a primer is vol. 7 of *Storia della Chiesa*, overseen by Hubert Jedin (ed.), *La chiesa nell'epoca dell'assolutismo e dell'illuminismo* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1994), in particular pp. 67–87, and Joseph Bergin, *Crown, Church and Episcopate under Louis XIV* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

¹³² As Freschot noted in 1709, 'S'il falloit juger de la religion des vénitiens pas l'estime qu'on y fait absolument de tout ce qui vient de Rome, on seroit tenté de'en juger à son désavantage. Quoi que Venise soit en Italie ... cependant il n'y a pays au monde où l'autorité du St. Siège soit plus limitées qu'à Venise'. Without demanding freedom for the Gallican Church, the Senate granted the pope anything that was not an inconvenience and stopped all initiatives by the Court of Rome exactly where it wanted them to stop without angering anyone: Freschot, *Nouvelle relation de la ville et république de Venise*, p. 323.

¹³³ On the matter, see the entry in Armando Petrucci, *Alessandro VIII*, in *DBI*.

¹³⁴ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 585, report by Abbot Chierichelli datable to the beginning of January 1681. Moreover, against a backdrop of signs and speculation regarding the fate of leading figures, the fear prompted by the comet was felt in all groups that had dealings with politics and news. All announcements and gazettes reported the news in

enthusiasm of a group of students, clergy and laypeople led to the creation of a sect: 'the atheist Truth'.

According to information that reached the Inquisitors of State, this was 'a clique of depraved spirits, including some foreigners, in which highly observable things ... are done':¹³⁵

under the pretext of a pastime, and recreation, a meeting is held in the form of a council, or Academy, entitled the atheist Truth, attended by laypeople and also clergy from different nations, countries or states, with false titles, some of patriarch, some of archbishop, some of bishop etc ... to make – as indeed they do – constitutions, orders

and going as far as 'even granting the authorization to contract marriage between people of the same sex, and also offering titles and degrees of honour to those who want to enter this school'.¹³⁶

Everything was based on a document in Latin which listed the formulae for ordination. It seems to have been read quite widely at the University of Padua, but only a more restricted group was allowed to vote in the elections, which saw the group's main instigator, Antonio Leonardi, a minor priest from Verona, ascend to the false throne. Some of this elite group were from Venice, while others came from various centres in the state of the Republic or abroad.¹³⁷ From what the Inquisitors managed to discover, meetings of this kind were a long-established habit of students in Padua,¹³⁸ and the 'Truth' was by no means the last episode. In the 1720s, for example, there were reports of a group of 'students' who 'had made their own law', and although it is difficult to establish exactly what it was about, the fact 'that in the said law they ate meat on Friday and Saturday' could give us a rough idea of the group's position with regard to Catholic orthodoxy.¹³⁹ The only difference between these groups was in the exact form that they took. In

concerned tones and saw the inevitable fate forecast by the comet in many events that took place. See, for example, ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, report by Camillo Badoer on 19 January 1681.

¹³⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1216, trial against an atheist Academy in Padua, letter from Inquisitors to Rectors on 8 June 1681, c. 1r.

¹³⁶ Ibid., enclosed written document, c. 2r.

¹³⁷ Ibid., deposition by Giovan Battista Britti before Podestà of Padua on 11 July 1681, c. 8v bis.

¹³⁸ Ibid., c. 11r bis.

¹³⁹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 142, trial against Antonio Pisani, spontaneous appearance by Angelo Mazzon on 21 August 1736.

1681 the cue for structuring the work of the heterodox-student group¹⁴⁰ in these terms came from d'Estrées's visit and the news, expectations and discussions that preceded and accompanied him. These thoughts and feelings also found distribution channels outside the student environment and gradually spread to a wider audience. One member of the atheist group, Don Zuanne Zalio from Feltre, explained to his landlady one evening around the fireplace that:

there was a city of a place, I don't know where, in which they wanted to make their own pope ... I think I was also told that they wanted to create priests as they liked, without depending on our pope. And I remember now that this happened when that French cardinal, I think his name was Detré, came here to Padua, and I was told that he was going to Rome to give a message to the Pope from the King of France: the King wanted to do things his way, otherwise the French would elect another pope.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Episodes of irreligiousness among students were certainly nothing new. In 1652, for example, an armed group – it is not known whether they had melee weapons or firearms or both, as this made a difference – wearing 'glasses without lenses' (the symbolism escapes me) – went to Venice and went along the 'busiest streets in the Merceria area and elsewhere, even going to St Mark's Square at the time when it was busiest, and expressing themselves in the form of songs, obscene words, with contemptuous manners, with slander and defamation to the detriment of religion and the clergy with barefaced temerity'. They were accompanied by women 'and a young man wearing a mask which covered half of his face'. Seven of them were identified: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 83, 19 February 1652. A few years later their fellow students Antonio Mutoni, Girolamo Spilimbergo, Girolamo Pittoni and Lorenzo Battizocco insulted passengers on a boat trip from Padua to Venice, reserving especially explicit treatment for friars. They started by offending them 'with mockery and injurious words' and then moved on to making up 'shocking and loathsome' songs. They decided to finish by 'starting heretical discourses'. Three days later Mutoni offered a solo repeat performance in the same boat: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 100, 24 January 1668. Those who had observed the members of the 'atheist Truth' from up close were able to guarantee 'that they studied little, and that they enjoyed themselves and womanised whenever they could', which did not make them very different from other students: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1216, trial against atheist academy in Padua, deposition by landlady Giustina Farsura on 12 July 1681, c. 16v bis. Casanova, who would frequent the same environment a few years later, described his fellow students in this way: 'They carried whatever forbidden arms they pleased; they freely seduced girls of decent family whose parents could not keep them under supervision; they frequently disturbed the public peace with nocturnal pranks: in short, they were a set of unbridled youths who asked nothing but to satisfy their whims, amuse themselves, and laugh.' In this description there was naturally no implicit moral resentment: Casanova, *History of My Life*, vol. 2, p. 94. See also Gabriel Naudé, *Epistolae* (Geneva: Widerhold, 1667), letter to René Moureau from Padua, 16 May 1627, pp. 62–3.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., deposition by Isabella Mazeno on 13 July 1681, c. 22v.

In this case the communication chain also had a weak link and the transmission process suffered as a result. Nevertheless, some form of circulation and response did take place. A cardinal's trip to solve matters of a political-religious nature, the news that accompanied him and the expectations he created all added up to a series of influences sufficient to generate an 'atheist' sect. Regardless of whether this term was used in its strict sense, it was still a group of people who made a heterodox religious choice and attracted the interest of a political body with the status of the Inquisitors of State. This choice was made by drawing on news that was widely available in the political information market. The oral dimension did the rest; the fact that students acted as intermediaries, transmitting the same information to landlords, created a communication chain that might have twisted messages during the process, but at least gave them the opportunity to reach a wider audience through oral means.

Biographical matters

One thing seems certain in the general overview of the news market in the city – those operating in the field of acquiring and dealing in information were often characterized by a degree of flexibility regarding orthodoxy and faith, and by less than faultless behaviour. Fra' Paolo Piazza, a master at the Frari, provides a good example of this. After being involved in an episode regarding banned books at a very young age in 1628 and being called to clear himself before the Sant'Uffizio,¹⁴² he started frequenting diplomatic circles as a collector of information, with guaranteed protection from nunzios and a blind eye turned by the Inquisitors of State, to whom he provided the service. In 1669 he was sent to prison and the Nunzio intervened to have him released. The decision to release him was duly made on 22 June 1669 by the Inquisitors of State, on account of 'the obligation which the Serenissima Republic must have to match the many favours done by the benign nature of the pontiff in such difficult tormented times, overcoming any obstacle and formality'.¹⁴³ In 1671 he became a watchman but does not seem to have become any more scrupulous – as soon as he heard about the death of Fra' Girolamo Zaltieri, a prior in Mestre, he hastened there without calling a chapter meeting and took possession of 'the best part of his things, together with money and a silver table service'. Zaltieri had owned reasonable assets because 'he aspired to a career in the Church and needed to increase his wealth, and especially by buying decorations for the church, furniture for his house and other furnishings and fittings'. This time the Provveditori Sopra Monasteri (Proveditors over the

¹⁴² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 86, trial against Salvatore de Negri, deposition by Fra' Andrea da Spello and Fra' Paolo Piazza on 3 November 1628.

¹⁴³ ASV, *Collegio, Esposizioni Roma*, reg. 44, c. 16r [42].

monasteries were a secular office created by the government in order to control the discipline of monks and nuns) intervened and ordered him to return his ill-gotten gains.¹⁴⁴ In the meantime he kept up his diplomatic contacts and was in close contact with French Embassy staff, who ‘revealed the secrets of the noble Senate, the morning after the evening in which they had been stipulated’¹⁴⁵ and the Savoy.¹⁴⁶

On the other hand, the disinterest in faith shown by those connected – by inclination or profession – to the world of news was at least equal to the interest they had in religious matters, in the general sense of the facts, events and political questions in that field. One important figure in this respect in the 1660s and 1670s was Alessandro Pariglia, a notary who although not a professional gazetteer worked at the centre of a dense network of information exchange and acquisition, so much so that Giovanni Quorli – one of the leading *reportisti* in the city – rated him as one of his main competitors.¹⁴⁷ Whether as a result of his clientele – he drew up deeds for nobles, ambassadors’ servants, merchants and other dignitaries of the Order of Malta – or personal passion, his studio below the Procuratie was one of the best known among those who wanted to acquire news about ‘world events’, be informed about them, discuss them and thus become intermediaries themselves. He collected information, drew up papers and discussed them in his studio; in this way noblemen, priests, travellers and common people came together to read and discuss the gazettes that the notary received from all over Europe. Therefore, in order to find out the details of the main talking points around the city, the best thing a shrewd informer such as Camillo Badoer could do was to go ‘to the door of Mr Pariglia the notary, where the *novellisti* group together’. He invariably found a ‘crowd’ there made up of an extremely diverse range of people exchanging information and discussing various topics.¹⁴⁸ The network of relations he had built up throughout his career allowed him to deal with patricians and ambassadors and carry out diplomatic tasks for foreign princes, which earned him a good reputation. For example,

¹⁴⁴ ASV, *Provveditori sopra monasteri*, b. 274, Piazza file, denunciation by Fra’ Ottavio Vicentini on 18 July and sentence on 30 December 1671.

¹⁴⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 639, report by Francesco Giupponi on 31 March 1671.

¹⁴⁶ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, report by Camillo Badoer on 9 June 1673.

¹⁴⁷ For more detailed information about Pariglia’s work and ties with the world of gazetteers, see Mario Infelise, ‘Professione reportista. Copisti e gazzettieri nella Venezia del ‘600’, in Stefano Gasparri, Giovanni Levi and Pierandrea Moro (eds), *Venezia. Itinerari per la storia della città* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997), pp. 193–219, in particular pp. 198–9. On relations with Quorli, see ASV, *Avogaria di Comun, Miscellanea civile*, b. 233, fasc. 13, Florence, 24 November 1668.

¹⁴⁸ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, report by Camillo Badoer on 10 February 1677.

in 1662 Charles Emmanuel, the Duke of Savoy, personally thanked him for services rendered,¹⁴⁹ services which he continued to render faithfully until at least 1664.¹⁵⁰ The notary's habit of dealing with political matters probably led him to consider religion as a shield, or rather an instrument, as he stated quite calmly 'often ... that if he had found someone willing to pay him a hundred *zecchini* a month for not believing in God, he would have done it'.¹⁵¹

The leading figures in the news world shared Pariglia's religious indifference. Whether they were laymen or clergy, these writing pioneers did not have any special reason to believe or not believe, and considered the salvation of the soul to be something of secondary importance at best. In this way the worlds of news and heterodoxy tended to overlap and blend into each other. Furthermore, the connection between them was also clear by virtue of a simple biographical matter: both activities (considering heterodoxy through its aspects of public criticism and the spread of forbidden ideas) involved risks that tended to attract and be associated with a certain category of individuals, or least interest people with similar attitudes in the same social circles. One of many cases in this respect was Don Girolamo Rossi, the head priest at Santa Maria Formosa, who was brought before the Sant'Uffizio in 1665 for solicitation in the confessional and acts of magic.¹⁵² He had a close but sometimes stormy relationship with the gazetteer and writer Giovan Battista Angeloni, who was also targeted by the Sant'Uffizio for distributing forbidden material, and was at the same time associated with Andrea de Vescovi, Chancellor of the Sant'Uffizio and a writer, although his work as a *reportista* is not documented. In 1683 Rossi continued working underground and provided the French ambassador with information.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁹ ASTO, *Materie politiche per rapporto con l'estero, Lettere Ministri-Venezia, mazzo 9 bis*, file 3, various letters sent by Charles Emmanuel II, Christine of France and the King of Poland to Abbot Vincenzo Dini, letter of 15 May 1662.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., letter from Abbot Vincenzo Dini on 20 June 1664.

¹⁵¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 119, trial against Federico Gualdi, written denunciation by Francesco Giusto presented on 21 April 1676, c. 4r.

¹⁵² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 113, trial against Don Girolamo Rossi from Venice and Giovan Battista Angeloni.

¹⁵³ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 652, report by an informer at the Nunciature on 22 March 1683. Domenico Greco – or, as he also called himself, Agostino Greco or Domenico Moro – also frequented the same circles at the same time, taking refuge in Venice after being banished from Rome. He embarked on a career as a 'virtuoso writer' and served Andrea Borghi, the Secretary of the Nunciature, and various patricians 'with the pen'. According to an anonymous denunciation presented to the Consiglio di Dieci in 1666, 'he writes against the Church, and his reports go to foreign lands into the hands of Lutherans, who have them printed, and recite them from pulpits to deride the Catholic faith': ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 99, 15 March 1666. Although the denunciation mentioned many

The link between religious and political discourse was also guaranteed by a fact which is worth remembering although perhaps of little significance; many of the gazetteers and informers in the group of professionals and enthusiasts dedicated to politics and state secrets were actually friars or more generally religious. A huge number of them gravitated around the world of news acquisition and distribution, so much so that attempts to quantify them would be fruitless. Instead, I will try to give an idea through examples, limiting myself to mentioning some documented cases in the 1670s and 1680s.

Fra' Mozzarelli, the Bachelor of the Frari, was perhaps tired of the 'cave' that he felt represented the condition of friars and needed diversions. As a result, he was extremely loyal to the French ambassador, with whom he often had lunch and for whom he acquired news. He was supported at the same time by Maurizio Vota – a Jesuit, who often 'digressed into matters of state'¹⁵⁴ as he was also well connected in the network of high nobility relations, 'in the geography academy that he ran' – another Jesuit named Mattioli, two Franciscans from San Francesco della Vigna and a large number of nuns. Information was also acquired by less direct means, given that Mattioli was the confessor of the nuns of San Lorenzo, who supplied him with exciting news. At the same time, the Frenchman Fra' Bonaventura Duplessis from Santo Stefano acted as a loyal servant to his country by entering noble homes under the pretext of giving language lessons and then hurrying to the Embassy to relate what he had heard. He obtained further information from Don Lunario, a secular priest from the parish of San Maurizio. In addition to being the parish priest's pupil, he was also the confessor of a 'very simple' patrician. Whenever the latter heard a confidential piece of knowledge, he went straight to tell the priest, who 'with artful questions manages to make him tell everything that he has heard from the nobleman during their frequent conversations. Indeed, the nobleman tells him secret things which are discussed in the Doge's Palace out of loyalty to the priest and in order to get advice.'¹⁵⁵

In 1676 another Jesuit, Leoni, was also at the service of France and 'in his *Oratori della buona morte*' he held 'meetings about the interests of his country with other Frenchmen, in which people from the French Embassy also take part sometimes'. This was the same ambassador who had moreover named him as his

witnesses, above all gazetteers (including none other than Alessandro Pariglia), it was not accepted.

¹⁵⁴ ASVat, *Segreteria di Stato, Venezia*, b. 116, despatch from Nunzio to the Secretary of State on 11 July 1676, c. 450r–v.

¹⁵⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 560, report by Fra' Costantino on 19 January 1677. Information about friars connected to the world of political information is taken from various files of reports to the Inquisitors of State.

confessor.¹⁵⁶ Pro-Gallican tendencies were also shared by the parish priest of San Marcilian, an undercover gazetteer and habitué of coffee houses, and Giovanni Macazzoli, a canon who lived with a female singer from Rome that he used 'to make conversation' and thereby procure information.¹⁵⁷

The confessor of the nuns of Santa Giustina, a certain Fra' Chiesa, was under the payroll of the *residente* of Malta. The librarian of the monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore, one of the cultural and political centres of the city, collected information for the Spanish ambassador accompanied by a certain Fra' Agostino from the Gesuati. At the same time the monastery was the favourite meeting place of the *residente* of Mantua, the French ambassador and their other friends.¹⁵⁸ Fra' Melonari, a Servite, and Francesco Ravaglia, a Minor Conventual at the Frari, also worked for the Spanish, along with a large number of abbots and nuns.

Don Agostino Alfieri habitually combined his job as an informer for the Spanish ambassador with his work as a gazetteer. He said that he did not fear the Inquisitors of State much, even though they had sometimes shown interest in him, because he always heard what had been decided in the court from a well-positioned friar. When the worst came to the worst, he took refuge in the Spanish Embassy.¹⁵⁹ He must have miscalculated, or perhaps realized that he had failed to distinguish between the Inquisitors of State and the Sant'Uffizio, when in April 1681 the Inquisitors imprisoned him and sentenced him to death for a series of thefts.¹⁶⁰ In the meantime, however, he had made contacts with the Nunciature through his work as a spy and *reportista*. Rome stepped in and the sentence was suspended thanks to the efforts of the Venetian ambassador.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ ASVat, *Segreteria di Stato, Venezia*, b. 116, despatch from Nunzio to the Secretary of State on 11 July 1676, c. 449r.

¹⁵⁷ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 6 May 1686.

¹⁵⁸ The liveliness of the monastery annoyed those who wanted to dedicate themselves to study and research: in 1714 Cassinese and the future cardinal Angelo Maria Querini complained about 'too much intimacy with relatives', the 'frequency of visits' and the 'mayhem of the city', which impeded study and favoured conversation instead: Antonella Barzazi, *Gli affanni dell'erudizione. Studi e organizzazione culturale degli ordini religiosi a Venezia tra Sei e Settecento* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2004), p. 57.

¹⁵⁹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, report by Onorato Castelnovo on 22 April 1679. He was assisted in collecting information by another friar, a certain Fra' Premuda, a Dominican from San Giovanni e Paolo.

¹⁶⁰ ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 114, 18, 24 and 31 March. The death sentence was handed down on 28 April 1681. See also ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 567, report by Onorato Castelnovo on 27 April 1681.

¹⁶¹ Traces of the efforts made by Rome to save him are preserved in ASVat, *Segreteria di Stato, Venezia*, b. 123, cc. 22v, 354r-v, 357r, 366r and 372r. In the end, after various prelates

To give further examples, a certain Don Carlo, a habitué of *spezierie*, took his orders from the *residente* of Modena. A Carmelite friar served the Duke of Mantua together with a Servite, whose surname was Emo, and Don Teodoro, the parish priest of San Vidal. The latter had important contacts among the nobility, also thanks to a prostitute who lived in his house and was shared out generously. His arrest by the Inquisitors of State and the treatment he received in the Piombi prison must have made quite an impression on him, as after his release 'he went mad, and escaped for the whole night half-naked, by climbing the walls of his house, nobody knows where he went'.¹⁶² Don Benedetto Orsati, a secular priest who also went by the name of Fra' Ferdinando, was luckier; after the Duke of Mantua had him imprisoned in 1679, he joined his payroll in the early 1680s as his informer in Venice and Rome. At the same time he felt it was better to keep working as an informer for both the Republic and the Nunciature. Don Angelo Gilli, from the church of Santa Maria del Giglio, also reported to the Duke of Mantua and made use of friendships with other priests who had connections in embassies to obtain information to pass on to the *residente* and use in his work as a gazetteer.

I could continue, but this should be sufficient. On the other hand, the Nuncius Carlo Francesco Airoidi observed in 1676 that it was not always easy to acquire information, as senators were on the alert and did not speak to him much 'and while it is sometimes possible to get some information, this is only due to one of the informer friars, from whom something can be obtained by swearing it as a religious secret'. It was therefore necessary to turn to friars, but this was not always enough: 'I do my best to be vigilant about news concerning the Republic, but I find it impossible to do it always because not all friars are aware of it, and I am not always on familiar terms with them, neither do I always have someone at hand that can act as a mediator'.¹⁶³ Around 50 years previously in 1620, Francesco Zapata, a spy in the Spanish ambassador's entourage, had already observed that 'friars and another kind of person – namely whores – are the real instruments of the ambassador for accessing the news'.¹⁶⁴ As we shall see later on, the ties that existed between diplomats and monasteries were of the utmost importance and were held in equally high regard; people went to great lengths to maintain them. The only people who did not ring the bells in

had pressurized members of the Consiglio di Dieci and their families, the death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment in the Camerotti.

¹⁶² ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 5 August 1685.

¹⁶³ ASVat, *Segreteria di Stato, Venezia*, f. 117, c. 176r, 15 May 1677.

¹⁶⁴ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 522, transcript of an interview that took place in the garden of the monastery of San Giacomo in Giudecca between the Inquisitors and the spy on 29 September 1620.

celebration to mark the fall of Buda in August 1686 were the Cistercians of the Madonna dell'Orto. They preferred to stay silent, as they had a long-standing close relationship with the French ambassador that went beyond geographical ties. On this occasion they decided that their political alliance should take precedence over the salvation of Christianity.¹⁶⁵

'Writings on tree bark'

Information also posed other potential dangers to orthodoxy, dangers which did not materialize immediately and were perhaps not seen clearly, but which nevertheless seemed to fuel a dark unease. It was not so much, or not only, the already 'reprehensible' fact that it brought certain events to the attention of a huge audience, but rather the dangerous attitude that it could help to form. Gazettes, described as 'delectable entertainment to delight gentlemen',¹⁶⁶ were fragments of text which appeared as fragments of the world. Unlike historical works and religious revelations – respectively portraying a past which could not be changed and a future which could not be speculated about – they gave an account of a world which was being described differently in every new edition. For clarity it was enough to state that 'today throws up something cold and tomorrow something hot' and that it was normal to chance upon news 'that when left in isolation for a while is discovered to be contaminated', turning into 'rancid news'.¹⁶⁷ As this information was only valid for a short time, it forced people to constantly redefine their view of the facts, expectations and ideas stemming from an analysis of events. With reference to quidnuncs, Montesquieu said: 'Hardly have they exhausted the present when they plunge into the future, and stealing a march on Providence, anticipate it in all its dealings with men.' This field of prediction was dominated by 'political astrologers', as one particularly astute commentator called them.¹⁶⁸ The consequences and repercussions were of some

¹⁶⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 10 September 1686.

¹⁶⁶ *Pallade veneta da sabato 29 agosto a sabato 5 settembre 1716*, in ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 713.

¹⁶⁷ Ludovico Antonio Muratori, *Epistolario*, M. Campori (ed.) (8 vols, Modena: Società Tipografica Modenese, 1901–1922), vol. 3, p. 1020, letter 906, to Carlo Borromeo Arese in Milan, dated Modena, 3 January 1709 and vol. 2, p. 580, letter 529, to Francesco Arisi in Cremona, dated Modena, 22 May 1702. For the 'rancid news', see ASV, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, b. 366, trial against Giovanni Batti, deposition by Giovanni on 11 September 1684.

¹⁶⁸ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 603, report by Giuseppe Antonio Gasparini on 22 May 1700. 'Everybody speaks about this turbulence of Mars, and they say that it's about to blow over, given that it can be seen that the planets involved are preparing for calmness', wrote an informer, Ranuccio de Baschi, from Rome in 1642: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 550, report

importance. First of all, after expectations had been created, people wanted to know what happened next and check the validity of their analysis, so they waited for news to arrive, which was at times a spasmodic process. Secondly, people got used to the idea that the truth was something momentary and elusive, although this was not necessarily a conscious process. The presence of multiple sources was a contributing factor to this second outcome. The newspapers that arrived on a daily basis often reported the same events in significantly different ways. Sometimes even the gazetteers themselves drew attention to discrepancies and referred to the different versions 'so that readers stick to whichever one they like'.¹⁶⁹ As one attentive observer underlined in 1676: 'the freedom of Venice, which allows the writers of news reports to plan them as they wish in their newsletters ... has made them so venal that they are no longer expected to write the truth, but to satisfy other people's tastes with regard to their interests'.¹⁷⁰

They no longer focused on the truth; readers and partizans had to make their choices on the basis of the principle of pleasure. Besides, the world of the '*novellista*' was an undoubtedly complex one. In addition to its non-homogeneous nature and the problem of the credibility of sources, it was also connected to a multi-faceted situation. For example, it was forced to take account of the new political perspective and the resulting new levels of reality. With regard to wars, this meant recognizing all the nuances, so that simple alternatives like neutrality or siding with one party or another were replaced by a vast range of intermediate

on 5 March 1642. The vocabulary of politics was often quite esoteric and referred to secret or reserved political knowledge: see Peter Burke, 'Foreword. The History of the Future, 1350–2000', in Andrea Brady and Emily Butterworth (eds), *The Uses of the Future in Early Modern Europe* (-London: Routledge, 2010), pp. ix–xx. The Marquis d'Argens preferred the term 'cabalists' to 'astrologers': 'Comme ils n'ont pas l'air assez riche pour qu'on croie qu'ils dépensent beaucoup en Couriers, on le figurerait presque, si l'on ajoutoit foi à leurs discours, qu'ils ont des Esprits aériens à leurs gages, et qu'il y a une étroite liaison entr'eux et les Cabalistes': Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d'Argens, *Lettres morales et critiques sur les differens etats, et les diverses occupations des hommes* (Amsterdam: Michel Charles Le Cene, 1737), pp. 97–8. Rumours and premonitions were combined in a letter sent by Lorenzo Tiepolo, the ambassador in Paris, to the Consiglio di Dieci in 1707: 'Everybody predicts misfortune coming from France, misfortune that could even affect the King's life. It is talk based on horoscopes drawn up in these times and on the planets. In this way the most rigorous surveys are conducted, but these are banks which cannot contain the flood of words uttered: it is true that credence must not be given to this type of forecast, but it is also true that such a widespread rumour cannot be ignored': ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti segrete*, b. 54, letter of 1 April 1707.

¹⁶⁹ The matter in question here was the outcome of armed conflict between the French and the Spanish in Valenza in 1656. The episode is reported in Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*, p. 93.

¹⁷⁰ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, report by Fra' Costantino on 19 December 1676.

options; a state could go to war directly or show its disapproval but more or less secretly support one or both sides, or only certain members of a side and so on. Enthusiasts had the task of completing the puzzle in an ongoing attempt to expound the plausibility of their critical finesse and show off.¹⁷¹

The fact that people were used to dealing with notoriously false partial accounts led them to doubt the truth in general. This phenomenon became part of the broad context of Pyrrhonism and the sceptical crisis that ran throughout the seventeenth century.¹⁷² The concept of historical truth experienced a particularly profound crisis in the second half of the century and the first decades of the following century.¹⁷³ In the end, the fields of historiography and information were not so far removed, given that the work of historiographers and gazetteers often coincided; works of historiography were often the result of acquisition or interpretation work by gazettes.¹⁷⁴ In any case political information, which was widespread at every level, undoubtedly played a vital role in moving the sceptical crisis experienced in the historiographical sector down to the lowest manifestations of cultural life.¹⁷⁵ With all the newspapers, news and different accounts of events, individuals were not presented with objective or definitive situations, but reports of events which had a short shelf life. These depictions of reality were subject to constant change and never assumed a definitive shape. The reality interpreted and then offered by gazetteers was very much a work in progress. As reality, or at least the portrayal of it, was constantly changing, readers got used to redefining their position with regard to what was real on a frequent basis.

In this way, readers of news publications all over Europe started to subject the traditional assessment methods used for political and financial matters to

¹⁷¹ On the aspect of the new opportunities introduced by concealment as a technique influenced by new scientific methodology, see Villari, *Elogio della dissimulazione*, pp. 20–21.

¹⁷² On this matter, see Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism*.

¹⁷³ On the issue of Pyrrhonism and scepticism in general, in addition to Hazard, see Popkin, *The History of Skepticism*; Carlo Borghero, *Le certezze e la storia: cartesianismo, pirronismo e conoscenza storica* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1983); the essays collected in Gianni Paganini (ed.), *The Return of Skepticism: From Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2003) and Gianni Paganini and Jose R. Maia Neto, *Renaissance Scepticisms* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009).

¹⁷⁴ On this aspect, see Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*, pp. 65–78.

¹⁷⁵ ‘The rise of the news-sheet in the seventeenth century made the unreliability of reports of the “facts” more obvious to a much greater number of people than ever before, since rival and discrepant accounts of the same events – battles for example – arrived in major cities on the same day and could therefore easily be compared and superimposed’: Peter Burke, *A Social History of Knowledge: From Gutenberg to Diderot* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 202.

a new type of analysis, contributing to the crisis of conscience which laid the foundations for the Enlightenment.¹⁷⁶ Readers or users of news in general became fully accustomed to accepting, perhaps unwittingly, that the truth had an expiry date ostensibly defined by gazettes or subsequent reports.¹⁷⁷ When the latter became available, they had to order events once again and adapt the overview that included them accordingly. It also meant that they could use their prediction skills in order to fill the gaps left by uncertainty, thereby leading to the emergence of the question of the probability that an event could happen or not.¹⁷⁸ In addition to affirming, at least implicitly, a new notion of truth as the sum of probabilities, the focus was transferred from the event itself to the interpretation of thoughts and principles. However, as Cardinal Sforza Pallavicino warned in 1644, similar forecasting skills were inherently dangerous, as attempts to predict rulers' behaviour were reckless, like trying to predict God's will.¹⁷⁹ It was like 'wanting to enter the cabinet of Providence', as Ludovico Antonio Muratori wrote a few decades later, almost paradoxically applying political language to the field of theology; he felt that whereas it might be possible to penetrate sovereigns' cabinets, it would be impossible to penetrate

¹⁷⁶ Brendan Dooley, 'News and Doubt in Early Modern Culture', in Dooley and Baron (eds), *The Politics of Information in Early Modern Europe*, p. 277. See also Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism*.

¹⁷⁷ A true *novellista* was always attentive to dates, and the tension stirred up by current events was one of the most common elements in satirical works: 'si quelqu'un devant lui s'avisait de tirer de sa poche une lettre, dans laquelle il fut fait mention d'une victoire, par exemple, remportée en Hongrie sur les turcs, il s'écrioit aussitôt à pleine tête: la date? Et si on luiu répondoit, du quatorze de ce mois, il ne manquoit de repliquer: cela est vieux; nous avons des nouvelles du vingt qui assurent le contraire': Alain-René Le Sage, 'La valise trouvée', in Alain-René Le Sage, *Oeuvres* (12 vols, Paris: Renouard, 1821), vol. 12, p. 211. The text was written in around 1740.

¹⁷⁸ According to David Wootton, the influence of the theory of probability through the work of Arnaud, Nicole and Pascal was the key moment in the structuring of modern unbelief. Although people did not reason in terms of probability in 1660 – see Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) – the perhaps unconscious introduction of the theory of degrees of consensus made it possible to separate different levels of rational belief. In other words, it became possible to replace Cartesian certainty with deductions founded on probability. In this sense, 'probability judgements are not central to the positive arguments of atheism and deism; but they lie at the heart of the negative claims of *unbelief*'. On the whole matter, see Wootton, *New Histories of Atheism*, pp. 50–53.

¹⁷⁹ Sforza Pallavicino, *Del bene. Libri quattro* (Rome: Heirs of Francesco Corbelletti, 1644), pp. 346–7.

the cabinets of Providence.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, as the distribution of information could not be prevented, it was at least opportune to reduce it to less extensive groups, for example by only using handwritten rather than printed forms. The Congregazione dell'Indice (Congregation of the Index) had tried to do this in 1602¹⁸¹ and was followed by the Sant'Uffizio on 20 April 1725, turning to Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni for support because of its relevance to Venice:

With great care and zeal, the Serenissima Republic of Venice has always made sure that printers who operate within the State do not publish works against the Holy Faith, public morals and the rulers. In the past it also prohibited the printing of news sheets, allowing only the circulation of manuscripts. Now for some years it has permitted the reprinting of the Dutch Mercury, provided it is corrected in some parts. Nevertheless, there are so many things included in the Mercury by the heretics of Holland against the Holy See and the Catholic religion that they cannot be removed completely, and besides some printers publish printed leaflets on a weekly basis which contain news from different countries, inserting notes and observations according to their taste and in accordance with their political passions. They then send them by post to their correspondents. We therefore hope that after this matter has been recognized and given due consideration, the wise senators and magistrates of the Republic will act accordingly and prohibit circulation in order to prevent any problems that this news might cause.¹⁸²

The results, if there were any, must have been extremely limited. It is clear, however, that there were many ways in which religious dissent and political information could be thrown together and many forms of 'disorder' which could have been generated by this widespread passion. *Novellisti* and '*politichisti*' made the most of depictions of politics even though they were not directly involved in it and had no ambitions to change; it was a product to observe, reflect on

¹⁸⁰ Muratori, *Epistolario*, vol. 3, p. 925, letter 800, to Carlo Borromeo Arese on the Borromean Islands, dated Modena, 2 June 1707. It was pointless to try to be 'astrologers' because providence had 'secret mechanisms and master strokes, which can easily stun and mock those great minds, who think they have the upper hand over future times': *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 965, letter 850, to Carlo Borromeo Arese in Milan, dated Modena, 12 April 1708 and vol. 4, pp. 1450–51, letter 1252, to Carlo Borromeo Arese in Naples, dated Modena, 18 March 1712.

¹⁸¹ On 23 March 1602 Cardinal Agostino Valier wrote to several Italian bishops and inquisitors, asking them to monitor the printing of news: Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*, p. 158.

¹⁸² ACDF, *St. St.*, O 2-h, cc. 45r–v, letter of 20 April 1725.

and discuss, but not a practice to take part in.¹⁸³ Events, upheaval and politics were all part of a phenomenon and were thus treated as such. Religion was also part of the phenomenon as it was a political aspect of life; people started to investigate it using the same critical tools and applying the same spirit of scepticism. Information and religious dissent were two stages along a path marked by discontinuity, although the trends and consequences it gave rise to – the idea of religion as a political invention – were already fairly visible to people at the time. The main large-scale influence that the information market had on religious matters was therefore a change in the way reality was interpreted, with an increase in the spread of a form of scepticism that started to affect religion too. Pierre Bayle was one of the witnesses of the phenomenon who realized this, claiming that Pyrrhonism was only considered to be a danger because of theology and religion, which in any case could count on the covenant of grace, the power of education and ignorance. With such contributions the number of sceptics was destined to remain meagre.¹⁸⁴ The danger of switching from historical to religious scepticism was a concrete one that people were aware of. Even La Mothe le Vayer felt the need to show off his apparent prudence on the matter, asking ‘Must we therefore conclude, given the many examples of little certainty found throughout all types of History, that it must not be taken into account at all?’ in his *Discours du peu de certitude qu’il ya dans l’histoire*, published in 1668. The three types of history identified were human, natural and divine: ‘I think I have managed to demonstrate ... that my intention is not to enshroud the latter in the uncertainty of which I accuse the former two, as one could not formulate even the slightest doubt about it without impiety.’¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Seventeenth-century Venice ‘had become a city in which consciences could consume experiences (even if set against each other) although they did not pass, in the full sense of the term, “through” them. Consumption was possible through representation: wars, conflicts, changes in states and religions all over the world and progress were read about, pondered over and discussed, sometimes with great verve, but the quiescence of destinies in which the Venetian state had become locked, the relativisation caused in insight and reasoning by a city which was already at the time both one of the most stably unchanging cities and one of the cities most affected by foreign patronage, mainly exempted people from staking their lives on any item of news. When almost everything had been consumed through representation rather than experience, it tended to take on a new dimension and be recognised for the specific importance it could have in the Venetian context. Without hazarding too much, it was a climate after all in which one could find measures for concealment, compromises and a small amount of practical tolerance’: Scarabello, ‘Paure, superstizioni, infamie’, p. 373.

¹⁸⁴ Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 5th edn (4 vols, Amsterdam, 1740), vol. 4, entry on ‘Pyrrhon’, pp. 731–6, in particular p. 732.

¹⁸⁵ François de La Mothe le Vayer, *Della poca certezza che c’è nella storia*, P. Amodio (ed.) (Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 1998), p. 90.

It has been said that in this way the information market ended up turning writers into philosophers, information into opinions and readers into critics, consequently creating a sceptical trend that led to extraordinary consequences; by combining with seventeenth-century developments in other areas of thought, it generated widespread scepticism about the ability to obtain any form of historical knowledge.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, thanks to the ability of information to penetrate the urban fabric and establish an extensive network, this systematic scepticism also inevitably affected other areas of experience besides historical knowledge. The phenomenon was therefore not limited to the educated classes; as I have already said, anybody could read, ask others to read or listen to second-hand reports and form their own opinions. There was then a follow-up in the form of discussions about what had been heard, the proposal of 'a political language'¹⁸⁷ and insults directed at those offering alternative readings of the event in question. In this way discussions about politics and the 'news of the world' created the right conditions for opening the door to new forms of religious dissent or spreading them to increasingly broad social circles. Meeting to discuss a variety of issues with dissimilar opinions and on the basis of contrasting reports was destined to contribute to the formation of an embryonic form of critical consciousness, which was soon directed against religion in general.

The constant shift from state secret politics to religion, fluctuating between political and religious matters, was the end result of the perception of the political and religious spheres as 'different aspects of reality ... different, but interconnected – or, to be more precise, mutually strengthened by way of their similarity', a perception which pooled them together in terms of their distance from people's cognitive abilities. Together with the mysteries of nature, it was a form of knowledge that could not be investigated, 'different aspects of reality ... different, but intertwined – or, to put it in a more precise way, mutually reinforcing by the means of analogy'.¹⁸⁸ In 1663 Roger L'Estrange, the English royal censor, claimed that information was dangerous because it made 'the multitude too familiar with the actions and counsels of their superior'.¹⁸⁹ This

¹⁸⁶ Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism*, p. 2.

¹⁸⁷ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 21 December 1687.

¹⁸⁸ Ginzburg, 'The Theme of Forbidden Knowledge in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', p. 32.

¹⁸⁹ Quoted in Christopher Hill, 'Censorship and English Literature', in *The Collected Essays of Christopher Hill* (3 vols, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1985), vol. 1, p. 30. Tacitus' 'political glasses' therefore had to be produced in as small a number as possible, and most of all he should 'chiefly be sure not to part with any but to choice personages, to the secretaries, and Privy Council of Princes, to the end that they might know the more easily how to govern the people; and that, above all things, as he valued his Majesties favour, he should keep

convergence of 'highness' and 'lowness' had a disarming effect; not by chance it was 'that swarm of forms of undisciplined curiosity, which dared to tackle "high" matters, thereby questioning ecclesiastical authority and rocking political authority' which created the agreement between the two powers after the Reformation that strived to repress talk of this knowledge.¹⁹⁰

There was a marked increase in the effort to learn about nature through experimental means throughout the seventeenth century. At the same time a form of revolution in the information sector opened the door to the discovery of political secrets, whereby state secrets could be revealed in discussions, groups and cliques. In *botteghe*, whether they were read silently or aloud, gazettes gave the impression that it was possible to penetrate sovereigns' cabinets and stand apart from others on the basis of one's personal ability to analyse political events. Camillo Badoer, an informer, wrote in 1684 that in barbershops 'there are meetings of different kinds of people, and everybody becomes a statesman'.¹⁹¹ Conceptual instruments such as Machiavellianism and the theory of the reason of State spread and became visible in political practice. They were therefore available for theoretical and critical use and were learnt by reading gazettes and discussing them at home and in public. The 'separate sphere' of high unattainable knowledge was now within reach, bereft of the sacred nature that had set it apart and lowered to human level. In the same way, religion was dragged down to the ground alongside man and was even considered to be man-made.¹⁹²

In a special context like Venice in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is safe to say that the relationship formed between information and dissent was in many ways implicit and controversial, founded on what Rosario Villari has

from communicating them to such seditious people, who in troublesome times might serve for lanterns to the simpler sort of people, who suffered themselves easily to be governed, when not being enlightened by learning, they might be said to be blind, and want a guide': Boccalini, *Ragguagli di Parnaso*, Cent. II, Ragg. 71, p. 249.

¹⁹⁰ Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, p. 65.

¹⁹¹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 4 June 1684. William Cavendish, the Duke of Newcastle, wrote to Charles II in the early 1650s that 'Every man now has become a statesman, both home and abroad, merely due to the weekly gazette', quoted in Gloria Italiano Anzilotti, *An English Prince: Newcastle's Machiavellian Political Guide to Charles II* (Pisa: Giardini, 1988), p. 156.

¹⁹² It is difficult, if not impossible, to establish which of these areas was attacked first and caused repercussions on the others. Traditionally, the definitive fracture between man and God was identified in the birth and development of modern science. I think that this explanation is highly plausible, but I think it should be underlined how the expansion of a feeling which widely discredited the case for religion as fact found a place in areas of experience which were perhaps closer to everyday matters and developed an extremely close link to the opportunities opened up by information and political discussion.

defined as the 'politicisation of new strata of the population' which, although it was 'incipient and partial', was underestimated for a long time.¹⁹³ I believe that the process that led political news to be circulated widely operated in parallel, although perhaps slightly out of synch, with the process that led unbelief to penetrate broad strata of the city's population. The language of religious dissent certainly overlapped with its counterpart in political discussions even if the ideas did not; people started viewing reality with a more sceptical attitude on a widespread basis, placing religion within the political sphere. In other words, they started to consider religion to be an aspect of reality, and as soon as it became an aspect rather than a category in itself, it was approached in a new light. Religion and politics had clearly always been entwined, but were now also linked when they were discussed, so that scepticism about one manifested itself in the attitude towards the other. A link was consequently created between political and religious scepticism more in terms of attitude than content; the former somehow opened the door to the latter. Revealing the secrets of politics meant that many could question all historical structures and institutions, and as soon as the most secret one, the political use of religion, was also revealed, the process had come full circle.

In the 1650s Girolamo Flech, a Dominican from the monastery of San Giovanni e Paolo, ably summarized this disposition for systematic incredulity, and his words provide a clear and graceful explanation of the connections between the opportunities for thought offered by the multiple channels of information, as well as the growing tendency to question the revealed truths. He explained that 'the four Evangelists were four poor notaries, who wrote what they heard people saying, and that they were like these news writers, in the sense that they contradict each other ... so much so that in order to make them coincide the holy fathers needed to write a book *De concordantii evangelistarum*'.¹⁹⁴ The need to reconcile different texts from the Bible via such means as several *Concordantia evangelistarum* was often produced as evidence for the limited credibility of the Holy Scripture. But this was a particularly vivid portrayal of a fairly widespread idea, namely that it was possible to subject the Gospels and the Bible in general to the same critical devices used for gazettes, newspapers

¹⁹³ Villari, *Elogio della dissimulazione*, pp. 27–8.

¹⁹⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 108, trial against Fra' Griolamo Flech, spontaneous appearance by Fra' Santo Ponticolvo from Venice on 15 May 1657. Contrastingly, a few years later *reportista* Giovanni Quorli reminded that 'newspapers are reports and not gospels': ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 714, undated letter (but later than 21 December 1669) from Giovanni Quorli to the Inquisitors of State. The implicit juxtaposition of gazetteers and evangelists is also found in Gregorio Leti, *Il ceremoniale storico e politico* (Amsterdam: Giovanni e Egidio Janssonio, 1685), p. 29.

and reports of far-off events. While the Evangelists were compared to gazetteers, Scripture became a text in which it was possible to find contradictions. Seen as the work of man, it was basically desacralized. In around 1760 Don Cristoforo Venier publicly claimed that it was 'a fable'.¹⁹⁵ The Gospels 'were written on tree bark and ... must not be believed', stated Giorgio Cottoni in 1693,¹⁹⁶ while a few years before, in order to deny the Trinity, Abbot Schenza had practised his textual criticism skills as follows: 'although it was in the Credo, the pontiff had put it there through *iure cervelotico*'.¹⁹⁷ Traditions and opinions almost tended to overlap or even merge in their imposture; Don Carlo Filiotti was sure of this in 1651 when he explained that 'while discussing the precepts of God, and those of the Church ... he had no difficulties with those of the law of God, but opposed those of the Church, because it was the opinion of men like him, and he did not take them into consideration, just as others would have done if he had had his personal opinions printed'.¹⁹⁸ Less than 30 years later Carlo Cima, a priest, echoed him by referring to books by the Fathers of the Church: 'anyone can write similar books in his own way, and say whatever he likes ... and he could still make books in his own way, and say whatever he liked'.¹⁹⁹ Tommaso Zattoni from Padua concluded in the early eighteenth century that Scripture was founded on 'abstract analogies' and was no more than a 'holy novel'.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 148, trial against Don Cristoforo Venier, spontaneous appearance by Don Daniele Molin on 1 March 1763.

¹⁹⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 127, Cavalieri Domenico file, trial against Giorgio Cottoni, spontaneous appearance by Michele Mezario on 17 February 1693.

¹⁹⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 124, Don Erasmo Futino file, trial against Abbot Schenza, spontaneous appearance by Fra' Lorenzo Turichia on 12 November 1686. 'Iure cervelotico' was probably a personal interpretation of the differentiation between divine law and positive law – already widespread in some Erasmian groups at the start of the sixteenth century and which subsequently enjoyed even wider circulation – aimed to underline how auricular confession had been introduced by pontiffs and not by Christ: Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus in Italia*, pp. 128–9. For an eighteenth-century example, see ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 142, trial against Giovan Domenico Bonlini, spontaneous appearance by Don Innocenzo Cherubini on 30 January 1738.

¹⁹⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 107, trial against Don Carlo Filiotti, deposition by Don Giovan Battista Balduino on 26 November 1652, cc. 8v–9r.

¹⁹⁹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 122, trial against Don Carlo Cima, deposition by Carlo Mancini on 12 December 1679. After all, as Menocchio had stated decades before, Scripture could really have been dictated by God, but all the additions had been made by men, who had increased the size of text for which 'only four words' would have sufficed and made it become 'like the books about battles that grew and grew': *Domenico Scandella detto Menocchio*, p. 65, declaration on 27 April 1584; Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, p. 11.

²⁰⁰ ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 22, letter by Captain of Padua Federico Venier on 5 December 1710.

Using texts to prove the veracity of his feelings, Tommaso started to visit the main monastic libraries in Treviso, in particular the Dominican library at the monastery of San Nicolò. Here, as Fra' Antonio Maria from Rover reported to the Sant'Uffizio:

he stayed there to study from morning to evening, and sometimes until two at night. As a result of this attendance I became curious to know what he was studying, because I always saw him take the Bible, and the Concordance of the Bible without studying any other books, I asked him what he was studying and he answered me that he wanted to acquire the maxims in the Holy Scripture, in particular in Genesis, which he seemed to be more dedicated to. I asked what feelings he had when reading the Holy Scripture, and which Holy Fathers he was referring to, and he answered me that he did not use the Holy Fathers, but that he took the Scripture to be the oracle of God, and his study was aimed at understanding it for himself.

He concluded by saying that:

in the Holy Scripture ... the characteristics given to Christ our Lord should not have been given to him, and also that the Holy Apostles, in particular Peter and Paul contradicted each other in many of their opinions, from which it is understood that the partial assistance of the Holy Ghost can't have been in them. He refutes the Holy Doctors of the Church, in particular Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, with impertinent negation, accusing them of contradicting themselves. In short, that the Holy Scripture entirely consists of abstract analogies, and he defined it with this particular expression, that it is a holy novel.²⁰¹

²⁰¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 131, trial against Tommaso Zattoni, deposition before the Treviso court by Fra' Antonio Maria from Rover on 24 June and Father Alessandro Cironelli on 3 July 1704. Zattoni's family situation might have influenced the constant interruptions to the trial, which started at the Sant'Uffizio in Treviso in 1704; as he was the respective brother and uncle of the Cancellieri Pretorio (Chancellors) in Treviso and Padua, and was himself elected Vicario Pretorio in Feltre in 1710, the local authorities in Treviso and Padua never managed to have him imprisoned, despite an arrest warrant being issued on 8 May 1706. It was only towards the end of 1710 that the Senate took over the case and allowed the Inquisitor in Padua to use the secular court: ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 22, 27 December 1710. Zattoni was presumably arrested in February 1711, perhaps following an attempt to escape to Bergamo, where his brother had moved to in his role as Cancelliere Pretorio. The trial then continued at the Sant'Uffizio in Padua, which since March of the same year had stopped informing the office in Venice, which had carried out a kind of coordination role during that period. I will therefore ignore Zattoni's fate: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 131, trial against Tommaso Zattoni, letter of 21 February 1711 from the

The body of dogma established by the Church was therefore just one option among many, an opinion which could be subscribed to or not. All people had to do was choose their 'favourite' alternative. In any case it was a matter for discussion, like a battle report or the political games of the Duke of Mantua with the King of France, or even the manoeuvres of the conclaves. Religion was thus seen in the same way as royal and human affairs of different levels of secrecy relating to men and power.

Comparisons

News and religion also interacted on numerous other levels. For example, the widespread argument which claimed that the strength of a religious confession could be measured in terms of concrete human data led to much greater interest in the world events in which it featured. In this sense religion was seen as a historical fact and the vicissitudes experienced by different confessions were signs of their plausibility.²⁰² Francesco Mattei, the former Chancellor to the Patriarch, adopted this tradition of thought to express all his disappointment and the sense of powerless rebellion about the outcome of the War of Candia. In around 1650 he stated publicly that God:

doesn't look after us any more ... by praying to Mohammed the Turks obtain victories against the Christians, and every day the rest of us say the litanies, the

Inquisitor of Padua to his Venetian colleague and the arrest warrant of 8 May 1706 issued by the Sant'Uffizio in Treviso.

²⁰² This argument was especially widespread. In *Chizzuk Emunah*, or *Faith Strengthened*, written in 1593 and circulated in handwritten form before being published in 1681, Isaac ben Abraham Troki, a Karaite Jew, claimed that the historical experiences of the Jewish people, still alive despite being persecuted, proved that the Jews still benefited from divine protection. On the other hand, in his opinion Christian history was dripping with misfortune, which led to the conclusion that God was not protecting Christianity. The author had contact with Catholics, Lutherans, Greek Orthodox members, Socinians and others in Vilnius, Lithuania. The Karaites were a group that had broken with the Jewish tradition in the eighth and ninth century because they refused to accept the authority of the Talmud. They based their religion purely on the Bible. Troki was also the name of the most important Karaite centre, also in Lithuania. Here they enjoyed full equality with Christians: Richard Popkin, 'Jewish Anti-Christian Arguments as a Source of Irreligion from the Seventeenth to the Early Nineteenth Century', in Michael Hunter and David Wootton (eds), *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 166. On Karaite Judaism, see Fred Astren, *Karaite Judaism and Historical Understanding* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2004); Meira Polliack, *Karaite Judaism. A Guide to its History and Literary Sources* (Leiden: Brill, 2003) and 'Rethinking Karaism: Between Judaism and Islam', *AJS Review*, 30 (2006): 67–93.

Body of Christ is displayed and nevertheless the defeats continue, so all these actions are utter balderdash ... the devil works more miracles than God these days and is also greater, because those who turn to the devil obtain everything but get nothing from God.²⁰³

These were arguments which went perilously close to doubting the already-wavering universal consensus as proof of the existence of God. As travel writing, which reached an increasingly large audience in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, produced examples of primitive peoples who had no knowledge of God, it was therefore not true that all societies were religious, just as all the great philosophers had not been.²⁰⁴ Before the universal consensus theory started to lose its value from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, everybody had the chance to look at the geographical aspect of religion, and although it was too soon to conclude that God did not exist, the ineffectiveness, contradictory nature and fallaciousness of individual confessions became clear. In 1660 Desiderio Bartoli, a friar from Vicenza who had taken refuge in Venice, held forth with the following statement:

see how many followers that idiot who got himself crucified has! Because there's hardly anyone left here in Italy. If you go to France, they're all Lutheran. In Spain they're all Jewish. In Germany and those parts they're all Calvinist, I really don't know where to find these Christians that follow our faith. If it was good it would be followed by everybody ... I don't believe in this fucking faith of ours, there is no other faith which is more stupid and more fucked than ours.²⁰⁵

Regardless of whether they were interpreted correctly, the analysis of news and reports that arrived from far-off places opened the door to possible alternatives of a heterodox nature. For example, with the Turkish offensive in Candia, the end of the 1640s and beginning of the 1650s were characterized by a series of episodes in which religious indifference was combined with a general rebellious trend against orthodoxy, whereby the suggestion to become Turkish became the

²⁰³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 106, trial against Father Francesco Mattei, spontaneous appearance by Don Marco Mattielli on 16 November 1653.

²⁰⁴ To this end, see Sergio Landucci, *I filosofi e i selvaggi 1580–1780* (Bari: Laterza, 1972) at pp. 190–199.

²⁰⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 109, trial against Fra' Desiderio Bartoli, deposition at the Sant'Uffizio in Vicenza by Fra' Benedetto Signori on 24 June 1660. In 1662 the Venetian Sant'Uffizio requested the trial papers from Vicenza to proceed with the trial against the friar. The Congregazione approved the transfer: ACDF, *S.O., Decreta*, 1662, 21 February 1662, c. 34r.

highest challenge thrown down against Catholicism.²⁰⁶ While on the one hand the news arriving from the front consolidated the practices of popular piety in the people terrorized by the Turks, on the other hand it created strange effects, whereby many said they were ready to leave Christ for Mohammed. In 1652, while discussing events in the Levant with his fellow brothers, Giovan Battista, a Franciscan from Camposampiero, said: 'let the Turks come, as I'll serve one prince like another ... if they don't want to do things my way, I'll do them their way'.²⁰⁷ In the previous year Tommaso Onorio, a Dominican, was convinced 'that religions are inventions' and eagerly awaited the arrival of the Turks 'so that he could put a turban on his head'.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ 'Eight years ago [we are in 1651], at the beginning of the present war with the Turks, Don Bernardino Todeschini ... in spring or summer ... while discussing this war with the Turks said that he couldn't wait for the Turks to come and destroy all of Christianity, and remove the Apostolic See to take away the deceit of living in the Catholic faith for Christians, and when I asked him what he would do in such circumstances, he answered me that he would play host to them and live in compliance with Turkish rites. The tone of the speech means that he, Bernardino, would live without faith': ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 107, trial against Don Carlo Filiotti, deposition by Don Bartolomeo Franzino on 19 December 1652, c. 16r. On the image of the Turks in seventeenth-century Venice, see Paolo Preto, 'I turchi e la cultura veneziana del Seicento', in *Storia della cultura veneta. Il Seicento* (10 vols, Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1982), vol. 4/II, pp. 313–41 and Paolo Preto, *Venezia e i Turchi* (Florence: Sansoni, 1975). There was a premature manifestation of a pro-Turkish attitude in the 1580s in ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 55, trial against Giuseppe Struppiolo. For an interesting comparison, see Giovanni Ricci, *Ossessione turca. In una retrovia cristiana dell'Europa moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002). On the war of Candia, see Guido Candiani, 'Francia, Papato e Venezia nella fase finale della guerra di Candia', *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 152 (1993–1994): 829–72 and 'Conflitti d'intenti e di ragioni politiche, di ambizioni e di interessi nel patriziato veneto durante la guerra di Candia', *Studi Veneziani*, n.s., 36 (1998): 145–275.

²⁰⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 106, Elisabetta file, trial against Fra' Giovan Battista from Camposampiero, spontaneous appearance at the Sant'Uffizio in Rome by Fra' Francesco from Montagnana on 3 November 1652.

²⁰⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 106, Caterina Tordana file, trial against Fra' Tommaso Onorio, spontaneous appearance by Fra' Girolamo Pranda on 3 February 1651. The implicit prospects for religious improvement in a potential Turkish victory were sometimes combined with political expectations: Giovanni Miari, a nobleman from Belluno, could often be heard hoping for a 'change in the state with the total destruction of the Republic', preferably at the hand of the Austrians or the Turks, whose 'customs, laws and rights' he admired 'as good, and wisely governed ... saying publicly that the religion of the Turks is good because it leaves people free and does not oblige them to fast on Friday, Saturday or eves of feast days, or to confess'. It was therefore a real religion, unlike that of the patriciate in Venice who 'conserve and maintain it among subjects purely for political objectives'. He consequently offered to meet the conquerors as consul of the city of Belluno: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*,

In the 1740s the Marquis d'Argens combined all the elements – travel reports, news and historical and biblical criticism – and used the abbot who speaks to Thérèse, the *philosophe*, to reach the following conclusion:

So we can see that the world is divided into four groups, that a twentieth, at most, of one of these four is Catholic, that all those in the other groups accuse us of worshipping a man and bread and of multiplying the divinity, that almost all the Fathers of the Church contradicted each other in their Scriptures, which proves that they were not inspired by God at all. All the changes which happened in Religions after Adam through Moses, Solomon, Jesus Christ and finally through the Fathers of the Church go to prove that these religions are purely the work of man.²⁰⁹

‘Wits’ and models of discourse

During the seventeenth century an increasing number of people reached similar conclusions to those of the Marquis d'Argens. Some did so by following individual paths, while others used second-hand beliefs or, without taking too much trouble, adopted words which they felt best expressed their sometimes confused feelings. One of the advantages of dealing with a later period and an unusual urban context like Venice is being able to partly avoid supplying a clear answer to the genealogical question regarding libertinism among the popular classes in the terms which emerged from the debate between Carlo Ginzburg and some of his critics. In *The Cheese and the Worms*, by analysing the case of Menocchio the miller, Ginzburg identified a hidden layer of popular culture which provided a link between cultural contexts separated in time and space, and which created a filter for subjecting Menocchio's readings to radical reinterpretations. Some, however, offered a different interpretation, suggesting that the miller's theories were distorted versions of doctrine from the educated tradition, which had reached Montereale through different but nevertheless identifiable channels.²¹⁰ As I have said, it is plainly difficult to establish the genealogical pattern of this

b. 75, anonymous written document naming 104 witnesses found in the denunciation box on 13 July 1647. Two days later it was approved and the decision was made to proceed with the investigations.

²⁰⁹ Jean-Baptiste de Boyer d'Argens, *Thérèse philosophe* (Paris: Editions Dominique Leroy, 1998), p. 40. The work was first printed in 1748, but was already in circulation in handwritten form. See Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*.

²¹⁰ See, for example, Zambelli, 'Uno, due, tre, mille Menocchio?'; Zambelli, 'Topi o *topoi*? Intervento sulla relazione di Carlo Ginzburg', in Paolo Rossi, Lucilla Borselli, Chiaretta Poli and Giancarlo Carabelli (eds), *Cultura popolare e cultura dotta nel Seicento*

knowledge in the Venetian context in the period in question. What is historically proven, however, is that chains of contact and means of communication provided a link between the different social strata. Moreover, heterodox unrest with leanings towards Averroism, Machiavellianism and Aristotelianism was widely present among the patriciate in Venice. In 1686 a libellous manuscript started to circulate in the city and was reproduced several times by copyists, thus reaching a wide audience. It was untitled and its author was unknown, but it was able to claim with regard to noblemen in Venice that 'when they are elected to the government and the supreme courts, the first oath they swear is that they do not believe in God, and that they will form a permanent alliance against the Holy Church and an infinite number of other similar more damned things'.²¹¹ In itself this accusation was no more than a variation of the stereotypical apostatic oath always attributed to heretics, witches and deviants in general. However, it was also an accusation directed at a social group deemed incapable of believing in anything 'that is higher than roofs',²¹² which had distinguished itself for its ability to maintain independence from Rome and on several occasions had proved its skill in manipulating religion and forms of worship for political ends. This was a sign that the irreligious tradition was still alive and influencing the Venetian ruling class at the end of a century that had seen the blossoming and triumph of libertinism in different forms influenced by Cremonini or others as a result of the support it had received from the patriciate, who seemed to embrace it as an official ideology at times. This libertine irreligious unrest, which can easily be found within broad sectors of the patriciate in the seventeenth century, combined with the inveterate anticurialism that had often characterized attitudes since the previous century, providing on each occasion an instrument and a means of expression.²¹³

Irreligious themes, blasphemy and an extreme desire to transgress are all present in one spontaneous confession which, although exaggerated, seems to provide a fairly meaningful picture of the mood of the Venetian patriciate

(Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1983), pp. 137–43; Giorgio Spini, 'Noterelle libertine', *Rivista storica italiana*, 88 (1976): 792–802.

²¹¹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 7 August 1686.

²¹² '... quoi que *da i copi in giù* ils croyent et vivent comme les autres, et se gardent bien de montrer le fond de leur âme': Freschot, *Nouvelle relation de la ville et république de Venise*, p. 375. The same words are found in Francesco Frugoni, *Il tribunal della Critica*, S. Bozzola and A. Sana (eds) (2 vols, Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo-Ugo Guanda, 2001), vol. 1, p. 36.

²¹³ There was a much longer history of what became defined as Averroism penetrating the ruling class in Venice dating back at least as far as the fourteenth century. From this point of view there is an interesting polemic in Francesco Petrarca, 'De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia', in *Petrarchae Opera quae extant omnia* (3 vols, Basileae: S. Henricpetrum, 1554), vol. 2, pp. 1038 and 1048–9.

in the middle of the century, a mood that in some ways continued to survive secretly until the following century. On 26 May 1647 the Sant'Uffizio received a written document drafted by a confessor in the act of confession under precise instructions from his penitent, Pellegrina, the wife of nobleman Francesco Donà. As she was ill and probably concerned about the salvation of her soul, she wanted to be reconciled with God and the Church. She went about it quite crudely, with an intensity which must have also accompanied the experiences she felt forced to recount:

I believed that man can be saved without doing good deeds. I was wrong, believing that God does not bother with these inferior shallow things. I was wrong, believing that God does not give me the necessary help to be saved, thinking I could be saved without divine help. Many times, instigated by the devil, I said that I wanted to become a Turk. I erred, asserting that the mortality of the soul is reasonable, but I didn't speak to anyone. Sometimes when I was suffering from anguish and temptation I uttered heretical blasphemy, saying that God is partial and unjust with me, punishing me without fault, but I did not persist in these mistakes for very long.²¹⁴

This confession had taken place on 3 May and on 26 May she decided to complete it before sending it off. Her remorse for other episodes and misdeeds, which she might have tried to hide on the previous occasion, must have got the better of her. These memories throw light not only on her behaviour and beliefs but also on a whole noble environment pervaded with unbelief and willing to resort to the most extreme forms to express it. She told of how the nobleman Carlo Corner repeatedly said that he wanted to become a Turk. She spoke about Roberto Valier and his blasphemous worship of a woman, whom he called his God. She talked at length about Federico Corner's theories, according to which 'when the body dies, the reasonable soul dies too, and we worry ourselves for no reason, and confession and communion are balderdash'. She even described the low magic rites practised by some of her noblewoman acquaintances. Managing

²¹⁴ The episode, in ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 103, Salvatore Caravaggio file, letter of 26 May 1647, was noticed by Giorgio Spini, who gave a brief account of it in *Ricerca dei libertini*, pp. 166–7, and Scarabello, 'Paure, superstizioni, infamie', p. 360, who writes with regard to the story that 'for the violent set of emotions that she wraps up her exceptional flashbacks in (in terms of content, but also her narrative methods), for the images she conjures up of the adventurous-extremist paths of sensibility that ran through the Venetian patriciate in the seventeenth century ... for all this it deserves to be remembered'. See also Gino Benzoni, 'Venezia e il Turco; Venezia e gli Asburgo', in *Da Palazzo Ducale. Studi sul Quattro-Settecento veneto* (Venice: Marsilio, 1999), pp. 213–43, in particular pp. 220–21.

to conquer her reticence, she then gave an account of all she could remember about a trip to Murano which had happened in around 1635. On the island, in a house used for these short trips:

I saw a life-size stucco statue of Christ being taken out of a cupboard. It had a diadem on its head and a male member, and I heard them saying: let's see if Christ is a virgin. Seeing that they wanted to make shameless use of the statue, I tried to escape but they forced me to stay, and so I saw the women having sexual intercourse with the statue (except for Betta Valier, Betta Marini and myself, who not only did not want to have intercourse, but did not even want to touch the holy statue) welcoming Christ's member into their vaginas. They were all standing and the statue was moving, steered sometimes by the men and sometimes by the women. I also saw Mr Ferigo Cornero and Mr Francesco Contarini having sodomitic intercourse with the statue, and all the others moved it behind them so that Christ's member entered Ferigo and Francesco's anuses. As I could not bear such abominable appalling sacrilege, I gave everybody a harsh reprimand when I saw them start to treat the statue of our saviour so badly, and I swear that if I had foreseen what happened, I would never have gone to that house, as indeed I never did any more. I don't know who made the statue, or who took it there, or where it is now.²¹⁵

The period in which Pellegrina's experience on Murano and repentance took place – the 1630s and 1640s – was characterized by what could be defined as triumphant libertinism. They were years that saw France, Venice and Tuscany line up in an anti-papal stance; with the fleeting episode of the Wars of Castro, a strong compact front seemed to have developed that appeared to have found a way to stand its ground against papal demands. They were also the years in which the Accademia degli Incogniti (Academy of the Unknowns) became an active influential cultural centre for libertinism, a hub of development and point of reference which shaped Venetian heterodoxy, at least in the way that it was perceived in certain environments.²¹⁶

²¹⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 103, Salvatore Caravaggio file, letter of 26 May 1647. According to the detailed list supplied by Pellegrina, numerous people were present, all of whom belonged to the nobility.

²¹⁶ I do not think it is necessary to dwell, except briefly, on affairs concerning the Accademia degli Incogniti and Cremonini's influence on it and the patriciate, issues which are covered exhaustively in Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, pp. 147–99. See also, despite a few inaccuracies, Monica Miato, *L'Accademia degli Incogniti di Giovan Francesco Loredan, Venezia (1630–1661)* (Florence: Olschki, 1998), as well as Laura Coci, 'Introduzione' in Ferrante Pallavicino, *La retorica delle puttane* (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo-Ugo Guanda

The Incogniti, who gathered around the central figure of patrician Giovan Francesco Loredan between 1630 and 1660, stood out for the way in which they warmly embraced traditional libertine themes. Largely made up of members recruited from the ranks of the Venetian and Italian nobility and clergy, the Academy created a literary link through which Paduan heterodox Aristotelianism, especially in the form influenced by Cremonini, managed to take root widely within the patriciate and other social classes.²¹⁷ In certain respects, its defining output was not especially different from that of other academies characterized by shallow literary ostentation, pompous concettism and endless discussions about futile affected topics. However, many of its most active members were adventurers – literary or otherwise – and unbelievers – people like Ferrante Pallavicino, Antonio Rocco, Maiolino Bisaccioni, Girolamo Brusoni and many others – and the outlook of the Academy was influenced by their spiritual and biographical unease, the result of leading lives on the loose and in the balance. There was therefore a tendency towards rebellion against all established morals and contact with erudite libertine themes and theories about sexual freedom, religion as imposture, the mortality of the soul, natural religion and so on. All this was accompanied by vast amounts of anti-papal literature, in particular against Barberini.

Cremonini's excellent reputation among the nobility meant that 'before joining the ranks of the Maggior Consiglio, entire generations of sons of the Venetian patriciate' had 'absorbed his doctrines'.²¹⁸ Rated as one of the greatest philosophers of his time, he could easily ask the University of Padua for a salary twice as high as Galileo's, even after the latter's telescopic discoveries, and could

editore, 1992), pp. IX–C and, above all for the formation of the Academy, Nina Cannizzaro, *Studies on Guido Casoni (1561–1642) and Venetian Academies*, PhD thesis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2001). For a new interpretation of Venetian libertinism and its cultural context, see Edward Muir, *The Culture Wars of the Late Renaissance: Skeptics, Libertines and Opera* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

²¹⁷ 'Cremonini's naturalistic philosophy was practically the official philosophy of the ruling class in La Serenissima for many years. Giovan Francesco Loredano and his friends were not an exception for the time. They were a tangible expression of a whole spiritual climate, which drew inspiration from a precise philosophical doctrine with an unquestionably heterodox tone. They were those who brought those ideal figures into the field of literature and traditions, figures which had already been created during centuries of irreligious speculation, of which Cesare Cremonini was the fortunate influential descendent': Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, p. 157. A more cautious stance on relations between Paduan Aristotelianism and libertinism was expressed by Paul O. Kristeller, 'The Myth of Renaissance Atheism' and, from another perspective, Paul O. Kristeller, 'Between the Italian Renaissance and the French Enlightenment. Gabriel Naudé as an Editor', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 1 (1979): 41–72.

²¹⁸ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, p. 155.

also rely on complete protection from the government in the Republic, which never allowed the Inquisition's multiple interests in him to go beyond the simple isolated collection of denunciations and supported his line of defence. This aimed to demonstrate how he had limited himself to interpreting Aristotle correctly, a task for which he was paid by the Republic in any case, and refused to force his line of thinking into the world of orthodoxy.²¹⁹ Whether Cremonini was driven by the spirit of service or whether he hid deeper-rooted, more complex support for the naturalism he taught, he certainly did not lack followers. Heterodox Aristotelianism spread from Padua to Venice with a rapidity and far-reaching influence that troubled the most pious elements of society.²²⁰ They were profoundly disturbed, for example, by Father Antonio Rocco, who gave philosophy lessons to noblemen, doctors, lawyers and chemists in his house in San Moisè until 1653. His pupils were attracted by his reputation and the boldness of his stance, and the varied group of individuals included important figures such as Fra' Fulgenzio Micanzio, the Servite Consultore in Iure and Sarpi's pupil and successor, as well as the main and original custodian of the latter's memoirs and a careful defender – in a world which had changed irreparably since the time of the Interdict – of Venetian jurisdictional prerogatives against papal interference. Rocco read out *De mortalitate animae*²²¹ in front of a large

²¹⁹ On Cesare Cremonini and his philosophy, see Heinrich C. Kuhn, *Venetischer Aristotelismus im Ende der aristotelischen Welt. Aspekte der Welt und des Denkens des Cesare Cremonini (1550–1631)* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996). There are some documents relating to inquisitorial action against him in Antonino Poppi, *Cremonini e Galilei inquisiti a Padova nel 1604. Nuovi documenti d'archivio* (Padua: Antenore, 1992) and Antonino Poppi, *Cremonini, Galilei e gli inquisitori del Santo a Padova* (Padua: Centro Studi Antoniani, 1993) and above all in Leen Spruit, 'Cremonini nelle carte del Sant'Uffizio romano', in Ezio Riondato and Antonino Poppi (eds), *Cesare Cremonini. Aspetti del pensiero e scritti* (2 vols, Padua: Accademia galileiana di scienze, lettere e arti di Padova, 2000), vol. 1, pp. 193–204. On his contribution to European libertinism, see Françoise Charles-Daubert, *La fortune de Cremonini chez les libertins érudits du XVII^e siècle*, in *Cesare Cremonini. Aspetti del pensiero e scritti*, vol. 1, pp. 169–91.

²²⁰ It has been said that 'the wind and breath of atheism were pervasive in Paduan intellectual experience, which owed so much to the legacy of Pomponazzi and, more recently, of Cremonini': Reid Barbour, 'Atheists, Monsters, Plagues and Jews', in Roger D. Sell and Anthony W. Johnson (eds), *Writing and Religion in England, 1558–1689* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 327–46, at p. 332.

²²¹ Enrico Palladio defined him thus in his denunciation to the Inquisition. It was probably one of Rocco's works, *Animae rationalis immortalitas simul cum ipsius vera propagatione. Ex semine, via quandam sublimi peripatetica, non hactenus post Aristotelem signata vestigiis, exercitationis philosophicae illibataeque veritatis gratia indagatur* (Frankfurt: Apud Philippum Hertz, 1644), which demonstrated that the rational soul was not immortal by nature, but only by divine grace, arguing that it was impossible to prove its immortality

enthusiastic audience, which had gradually grown as a result of the widespread independent recruitment work of attendees, and then discussed it, adding personal opinions and handing out copies. It had a guaranteed effect; those present were able to listen to him dialoguing with his own soul and begging it to die soon, or benefit from his attempts at biblical criticism and learn that Scripture contained numerous contradictions. For example, how could Noah's Ark really have contained so many animals? Themes explored in depth included the non-existence of purgatory, the opportunity to be saved in accordance with the law of nature regardless of one's chosen faith, and again through the law of nature the opportunity to commit carnal sin because 'that instrument was made by nature so that we can have our tastes and delights'.²²² Rocco was a firm fixture in the Incogniti network and used Academy meetings to explain his thinking and claim in front of a sizeable audience that the 'grace of the Lord was the carnal delectation that man receives in the act of Venus'.²²³ It was also well known how 'pluribus ab hinc annis Antonius Rocchus lector philosophiae erat solitus multa effutire contra fidem ac religionem catholicam'.²²⁴

A letter from 1652 described the situation and underlined the worrying spread of Cremonini's thinking more than 20 years after the philosopher's death. The anonymous denouncer felt that the Venetian state was 'infested with the doctrine of that damned Cremonini, who in accordance with Aristotle's beliefs taught in Padua that the soul is mortal, that the world is eternal, that God is not an efficient cause, that the heavens are pervaded by intellectual souls, and other errors, which caused atheism and impiety in many'. It also identified a continuation of Paduan Aristotelianism, which was perhaps even more dangerous, in Rocco's teachings. Indeed, Cremonini was dead, but Rocco 'continues for many years to teach the same doctrine, or rather errors, having planted these pestilential addenda in the souls of noblemen and others, and what is most important, of clergymen'. Rocco's philosophy was more damaging as it found better distribution channels for wider sections of the population and its influence spread, largely through the nobility and clergy who came into contact with it. For example, the parish priest of San Luca gave a sermon in the presence of the Nunzio and many other prelates, in which 'he defended theories which deny motion and claim that the world is eternal ... and that God is not

on a rational basis and putting forward, although in a controversial vein, a fair number of arguments in favour of its mortality. It was banned on 20 May 1645.

²²² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 103, Antonio Rocco file, spontaneous appearance by Enrico Palladio before the Inquisitor of Concordia and Udine on 3 November 1648.

²²³ Ibid., anonymous letter read out at the Sant'Uffizio on 27 February 1635.

²²⁴ Ibid., anonymous undated letter.

an efficient cause. He also defended the mortality of the soul and challenged the bull of Leo X'.²²⁵

Therefore, through the mediation of a parish priest or another clergyman libertinism was able to reach a much wider audience than the one the message had probably originally been directed at. Above all, individuals from different social classes found that they shared the same language, perhaps because of similar cultural horizons or at least a mutual intellectual unease. If heterodox Aristotelianism really did act as a form of official philosophy for the ruling class, embracing it meant in some way moving closer to what was perceived as a social model. The patriciate was an easy point of reference to observe and was therefore also easy to imitate. It was at least possible to reduce the distance that separated the 'idiot' population from the nobility in terms of thought, if not in terms of financial demonstrations or expressions of social class.

In the second half of the seventeenth century Cremonini and Rocco, who died in 1631 and 1653 respectively, were no longer able to trouble orthodoxy personally, but had no lack of heirs, who might have been more modest but were definitely just as active. It was above all their thinking, or rather what they had mediated and presented, which spread widely in different forms, also absorbing different cultural stimuli along the way. As late as 1711 the Benedictines of San Giorgio Maggiore were not particularly surprised by the 'poor principles in matters of faith' of their fellow brother Albanese, 'having been a student of Cremonini'.²²⁶ It showed that the memory was still alive and proved that at the beginning of the eighteenth century 'poor principles in matters of faith' were still immediately associated with Paduan heterodox Aristotelianism.

While there is no doubt that popular unbelief and irreligiousness emerged even without academic stimuli – after all, anyone could conclude that there was little divine participation in human affairs on the basis of personal experience and intellectual ability, however limited it may have been – it is just as certain that the relevant set of ideas was complete and available from at least the mid-seventeenth century onwards. It was a climate rife with heterodox unrest and heterodoxy had become common property, individually interpreted on the basis of different forms of communication and appropriation. As a result, each idea could be taken in, adapted and imparted again by a potentially huge number of people. In a certain sense, in the special urban context of Venice, the problem

²²⁵ Ibid., anonymous letter dated 20 July 1652.

²²⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, Giovanni Levre file, trial against Angelo Savioli and Antonia Toselli, deposition by monk Paolo Antonio Grandoni on 5 May 1711. I think that the term 'student' should be interpreted here in its broad sense, more as a follower than a real disciple. Cremonini taught in Padua until 1629 and in order to have attended his lectures, Albanese would have been well over 90 in 1711.

was not so much the presence of a person like Menocchio but the fact that there were hundreds of similar figures divulging statements, ideas, depictions and visions of the world, which each individual then interpreted for himself. Venetians must have been bombarded with information and interpretations. Paradoxically, though, originality suffered as a result, because ideas tended to conform to well-defined criteria.²²⁷ It was normal for educated and popular thought to converge, and erudite libertine themes and arguments also spread widely among the artisan and popular classes in the city, although more in terms of their formulation than structure. Reason was used in a critical capacity with a series of instruments that were more immediately linguistic than conceptual, instruments better suited to an outlook influenced by anti-curial unrest, more simply by dissatisfaction with the available means to be saved or by the realization of human inadequacy in carrying out the necessary tasks to achieve a comfortable hereafter. They were thoughts which were often standardized, an inevitable consequence of the available repertoire of emotions, vocabulary and conceptual instruments, but there were sometimes even significant differences between individuals. Originality perhaps shone through more in the processes than in the results, just as there was more in the corollaries and situations that triggered associations and ideas than in the final formulations. In this sense heterodox discourse could assume a more or less infinite number of forms, each embellished by the individual character of its proponent.

The success and resulting spread of an idea were also a question of the language through which it was expressed, or the images which it lent itself to be translated into. These basically depended on the underlying communicative potential of the idea itself. For example, Teodoro Stricher, a doctor in law who has already been mentioned several times, was a staunch supporter of God's indifference towards human affairs and the material nature and mortality of the soul. He was ready and willing to take part in a new assembly so that he could voice his opinions. He shared his views with a broad group of people including lawyers, notaries, drapers and workers from craftsmen's *botteghe*, and managed to find the right arguments to influence different groups. He not only quoted 'doctors' to support what he was saying but also offered bold interpretations of divine signs; when he could not find any fish at the market during Lent, he said

²²⁷ As Jean Wirth noted, 'Les cadres historiques, géographiques et sociaux du phénomène sont difficiles à tracer, car les assertions libertines réapparaissent identiques dans les contextes les plus différents'. It might be thought, as has been suggested for witchcraft, that this was due to invention on the judges' part, but 'cette opinion, nullement prouvée pour ce qui est de la sorcellerie, devient intenable à propos du libertinage, puisque nous avons des sources très différentes des calomnies et des aveux extorqués': Wirth, 'Libertins et épicuriens', p. 67.

that 'as God hadn't sent any fish, it was a sign that he wanted us to eat meat, thereby telling the Gospel'.²²⁸

The ability to move an idea from the world of reflection to concrete, sensory and perceivable ground involved a series of linguistic instruments, first and foremost the metaphor, with the soul seen as smoke from a cooking pot, the Evangelists as gazetteers and so on. The visual rendering of a concept anchored it in reality and made it easy to understand and use during discussions or in expressing one's thoughts. The social space in which all this took place was the discussion or debate, a dialectical exchange between two or more people, which was an inevitability considering the multiple opportunities for sociability to take shape. It is not especially important whether the words expressed were well thought out and defined or not, or whether they were nothing more than a series of juxtaposed images rather than ideas inserted into a homogeneous context. All this favoured the element of exchange, or rather the appropriation of fragments of arguments by those who took part in or were present at the public presentation of such thoughts. The result was not complex theories but reworkings of pieces of discourse put together by accumulation, ideas heard in discussions, read or heard read aloud and then adapted to personal inclinations or an individual's ability to understand them.²²⁹ Theories and beliefs were progressively combined on the basis of their underlying rebellious outlook, even though there was limited compatibility between individual elements. These ready-made ideas were single elements and it was up to those who used them to combine them as part of a personal vision of the world, thereby creating a collection of conceptual materials which were effectively second-hand but often assimilated and assembled in an original way. This patchwork technique was constantly used in the anchorage to reality of formulae or ideas that needed to be presented in a comprehensible form.²³⁰ For example, the presence of God and the credibility of religion were primarily measured on the basis of everyday facts in terms of moral values and prescriptive codes. The inscrutability of God's

²²⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 117, trial against Teodoro Stricher, spontaneous appearance by Francesco Priuli on 10 April 1674.

²²⁹ Silvana Seidel Menchi noted something similar with regard to the spread of Erasmus' theories: 'some Erasmian formulae broke free of their contexts and circulated autonomously ... once in circulation, those formulae lost sight of their origins and, together with this, the toned-down moderate mould that Erasmus had given them': *Erasmus in Italia*, p. 117.

²³⁰ The terms 'objectification' and 'anchorage' have been used in social psychology. The former defines a mental operation 'that makes what is abstract concrete, transforming the relational aspect of knowledge ... into an image of an object', while the latter indicates the 'incorporation of everything that is extraneous inside a network of more familiar categories': Willelm Doise, 'Atteggiamenti e rappresentazioni sociali', in Denise Jodelet (ed.), *Le rappresentazioni sociali* (Naples: Liguori, 1992), p. 249.

plans was anything but predictable, as religion and the next world answered to a very earthly kind of logic made up of exchanges, payments and compromises. Whether the currency in question was a prayer or a good deed, something was expected in return. This made it easier to move from one belief to another, or in extreme cases to pass from belief to unbelief. In this way orthodoxy could not ignore the field of experience, where it had to compete with a form of heterodoxy that could satisfy everyone's needs inasmuch as it was individual and made no claims about universal values. Nicolò Rompiasio built his 1722 vision of the world on completely empirical foundations; he denied providence 'and touching the bag in which he kept some money with his hand he said: this is providence. Go to Christ and beg him for some money, pray to him and tell him about the prayers, and you'll see that he'll kick you in the face'. He then moved on to the soul: 'fucking soul. Have you ever seen a soul? When you die, there's nothing more'. The real grace of God could be experienced 'when one's belly is full', while heaven did not exist and if it had existed it would have been a dangerous place because 'those who go up really high ... end up falling down and breaking into a hundred thousand pieces, and if Christ is in Heaven, he can stay there'. His best evidence for the assertion that Christianity was worse than Jewish and Muslim laws came from personal experience: 'go to a Christian to ask him to help you and then go to a Jew. You'll see that the Jew will help you and the Christian won't'.²³¹

This scepticism towards Church teachings did not require solid arguments, as it was self-evident, based on experience and boasted a strong tradition. Back in 1576 Matteo Vincenti, a turner, said that if he really had to believe in something, then he preferred to believe that he had money in his pocket.²³² In 1646 a certain Orsola Ciuran, a ragman's wife, did not hesitate to say that 'the soul is filth, and those who do not love their body do not love their soul either. What is hell? Nobody has met anyone that came here to tell us'. She also regretted having sometimes wasted her time on confession and the Eucharist.²³³

²³¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 139, trial against Nicolò Rompiasio, spontaneous appearance by Matteo Scaglioni on 9 July 1722, cc. 1v–2v. His position with regard to heaven was quite changeable. While he sometimes denied it, as in the above case, while at other times he saw it in abundance, such as when he claimed to have said: 'which heaven? There are four heavens, the one in the sky, the church, the *osteria* and women, and these heavens are opposed to each other': *ibid.*, declaration by Nicolò on 19 January 1723, c. 30r.

²³² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 40, trial against Marcantonio de Simon and Francesco Paluelo, denunciation on 1 May 1576.

²³³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 103, Ludovico Fugarola file, trial against Orsola Ciuran, spontaneous appearance by Antonia Sgambozza on 5 June 1646.

The constant repetition of such fragments of discourse, whether shouted or whispered, had the effect of consolidating beliefs and encouraging individuals to display increasing conviction. Statements by heterodox and orthodox supporters involved in everyday doctrinal discussions give the impression of an environment in which everyone had a ready repertoire of strong ideas and beliefs, with personal hobby horses and single elements collected in a frequently eclectic manner, ready to be tapped into at the right time but not organized into a homogeneous system of beliefs. Beliefs could be found covering just about everything, albeit in fragmented form, and an authoritative declaration of heterodoxy was enough to support the whole system, however weak, badly formed or precarious it may have been. Therefore, although it is impossible to understand and measure in detail how deeply people embraced unbelief and heterodoxy, it is possible to focus on moments of formulation and expression, the moments when ideas became words, taking shape through a ready vocabulary and a varying repertoire of other guideline ideas.

Depositions clearly reveal the aesthetic aspect of the way in which ideas were expressed. The very fact that concepts in a heterodox mould were frequently the subject of conversations and arguments shows to an extent that for many people they were like a calling card bearing the qualification 'virtuoso'. In 1651, when the previously mentioned Dominican Fra' Tommaso Onorio claimed that religion was, literally, a diabolical idea, that everyone was saved in their own law, that the Trinity was an invention, that friars could have carnal relations with anyone and that, consequently, the government of 'papists' was tyrannical, the prior of the monastery found no reason to be unduly upset. He had often heard him saying these things, but felt that he was still a good friar at heart – one 'says certain things only to be a *bel ingegno*, or as we usually say, a *galant'huomo*'.²³⁴ It was a feeling that governed many heterodox expressions of opinions and manifestations of unbelief; those brave enough to utter them in public, or at least hint at them, knew that they would become objects of both scandal and esteem, or at the very least would be noticed. The result was the creation of a complex world rife with figures who took on the practically full-time task of going public

²³⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 106, Caterina Tordana file, trial against Fra' Tommaso Onorio, deposition by Fra' Ludovico from Murano, prior at the monastery of San Pietro di Murano, on 6 July 1651. For the accusations against Tommaso, see *ibid.*, spontaneous appearances by Fra' Girolamo Pranda on 3 February 1651 and Fra' Angelo Maria on 15 February 1651. This stance was common to more or less all anti-libertine polemics and literature. According to Filippo Maria Bonini, wits ended up renouncing religion because of 'avarice of knowledge', shipwrecked 'in the stormy sea of fluctuating philosophies'. It was 'wanting to pass for a singular mind' that put the soul in danger: Bonini, *L'ateista convinto dalle sole ragioni*, pp. 20 and 36.

and preaching their heterodoxy, inspired by a wide range of different reasons. One such case was Marco Rusca, a Camaldolese who continued to celebrate Mass in 1658 despite having been an apostate for several years and ‘with all the people that he talks to ... states that when the body dies there is nothing more, because the spirit is joined to the body and is lost with it, and there is nothing else but death’. He continued by saying that confession ‘is done to oppress, and those who disclose their interests to others are mad, and he never discloses them, except for ceremony’.²³⁵

One therefore became a ‘*bel ingegno*’ (a wit) and ‘*galant’uomo*’ (a noble spirit) by putting forward propositions, theories or simple formulations that could create a scandal, perhaps by treating subjects usually considered to be sacred lightly. In January 1708 Gasparo Arnaldi, a count from Vicenza, rented a room in the house belonging to the Griffolano brothers, Giovan Alvise, a lawyer, and Giovan Francesco, a secular priest. During their frequent conversations Arnaldi claimed among other things ‘that God was imprudent in creating flies. That he does not believe that the soul is immortal, and that this is the opinion of *virtuosi*, that the pontiff was not able to deceive the English, as he did to others’ and furthermore ‘he spoke ill of the subject of indulgences, and the worship of holy images’. He felt that confession was a political invention, one of many that could be found in the holy texts, which pontiffs had supplemented with ‘whatever they wanted’. He also saw the texts as badly argued; a roast lamb made him think that out of all the things that Christ could have been compared to, the Church had chosen a lamb, which was ‘utter balderdash’.²³⁶

Similar language was used in the ongoing development of social models characterized by freedom of thought and unprejudiced intelligence. It was now firmly established that the wise, sage and virtuous were not those who led lives based on solid moral principles and piety, but those who did not believe in anything, who shrewdly questioned even the most untouchable dogma and were not deceived by the artifice of religion, a political instrument in the hands of the powerful to keep the others under control. Everybody played along as it was part of the social order, but the important thing was to make it clear that one knew the rules. They were times in which, as Giovan Francesco Loredan wrote, ‘those who don’t know how to disguise the truth don’t know how to live’. However, in

²³⁵ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 109, trial against Fra’ Marco Rusca, session on 20 August 1658, anonymous written denunciation. Various witnesses confirmed the accusations and gave further details when subsequently interrogated.

²³⁶ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 134, trial against Gasparo Arnaldi, spontaneous appearance by Don Giovan Francesco Griffolano on 24 May 1708.

order to be disguised the truth had to be known, and those who knew how to live certainly had the means to do so.²³⁷

In 1682 our old acquaintance Abbot Francesco Muselani claimed that ‘idiots believe that purgatory and the house of the devil exist, but not good educated men like myself’.²³⁸ Even when the existence of heaven and hell was acknowledged, Giuseppe Rossi, a doctor, claimed in 1692 that it would be preferable by far ‘to go where many faithless emperors such as Tiberius Nero and others have gone for company, rather than go to heaven with four fishermen for company’.²³⁹ Giacomo Stecchini learnt from a painter who taught him the profession that ‘children’ go to heaven, but later developed and expounded his own variation in around 1711, according to which ‘heaven was the heaven of idiots’.²⁴⁰ Daniele Alberti, the Cancelliere Pretorio in Mestre, took a more argumentative approach in 1719 when he tried to persuade friends and servants ‘that souls move from one body to another, speaking about the souls of men because he was talking about great *virtuous* figures, also saying in the same place, at the same time and on the same occasion that only idiots and ignorant people go to hell and that only great *virtuous* men go to hell, and that he wanted to go to hell among the great and *virtuous* men’.²⁴¹

This was a re-statement – duly adapted by the theory of the transmigration of souls – of Machiavelli’s previously mentioned dream; the connection between an individual’s intellectual stature and lack of involvement in matters of faith was an implicit one, but was clearly seen by many. People thought that they could become similar to educated men by reinventing themselves under their guide and repeating their beliefs, and that their words could be used as instruments of verbal conflict. To this end in around 1670 Marquis Francesco Maria Santinelli and Vincenzo Pezzi, a doctor, urged the merchant Francesco Giusto ‘not to believe in the sacraments, saying that good philosophers do not believe in anything but nature’,²⁴² while in April 1699, during a conversation with the bookseller and editor Domenico Lovisa, Paolo Marchesi Vedova, a

²³⁷ Giovan Francesco Loredan, *Lettere* (Venice: Guerigli, 1653), p. 279.

²³⁸ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 123, trial against Francesco Muselani, spontaneous appearance by Don Giuseppe Mauccio on 11 August 1682, c. 5v.

²³⁹ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 126, trial against Tobia Haselberg, undated written document, marked A, presented by Domenico Paterno during session on 22 May 1692, c. 2v.

²⁴⁰ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 135, trial against Giacomo Stecchini, spontaneous appearance by Bernardo Testi on 21 May 1711 and declaration by Giacomo on 23 February 1712.

²⁴¹ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 138, Margherita Mazzer file, trial against Daniele Alberti, deposition by Michelangelo Bellotto on 6 February 1721.

²⁴² ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 119, trial against Federico Gualdi, written document by Francesco Giusto presented on 21 April 1676, c. 1r.

lawyer for the Santa Maria warehouses, told him 'the opinion of most great men, that when the body is dead, the soul is dead too'.²⁴³ If the reference model was 'great men' or 'philosophers', there was certainly not much point in hiding one's thoughts, as they became instruments used to earn social distinction. A few decades previously, the author of *Theophrastus redivivus* had established the idea by stating that all truly wise men knew how to examine reality and discover the deceit of religion.²⁴⁴ The idea that it was 'philosophers', 'virtuosi' and 'wits' who could read the deceit of those in power and religion had become widespread and firmly established at all levels of society. The people in question moved against orthodoxy by turning their free thinking against the intellectual and physical constraints of their religion and taking more of an interest in it as a political phenomenon. It was precisely for this reason that being informed about the news of the world was one of the main presumed features of a *virtuoso*. It was 'for the delectation and convenience of gentlemen curious in a *virtuoso* way' that in 1716 Almorò Albrizzi decided to print a newsletter with reports of the latest war against the Turks.²⁴⁵ While on the one hand the custom of discussing news created a predisposition for scepticism, on the other hand scepticism, even in its religious forms, was a characteristic that raised a person to the status of 'wit'. As Montesquieu wrote, news enthusiasts 'imagine themselves of consequence, because they converse about magnificent projects and discuss great interests'.²⁴⁶

As far as the religious aspect was concerned, there was also an explicit assertion of superiority and differentiation in their 'derisory sneer' at the devout and their wisecracks.²⁴⁷ In this sense the attempt to distinguish oneself from common people, which was a typical feature of *libértinage érudit* and, as has been noted several times, included an elitist conservative component, was more a question of attitude and way of talking than of social belonging. The elitism of these libertines was more a personal vindication of specificity than a social fact, an attempt to classify society on the basis of freedom of thought rather

²⁴³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 129, Margherita Brancaleoni file, trial against Paolo Marchesi Vedova, spontaneous appearance by Domenico Lovisa on 30 April 1699.

²⁴⁴ See *Theophrastus redivivus*, G. Canziani and G. Paganini (eds) (2 vols, Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1981) and Gregory, *Theophrastus redivivus*, pp. 14–15.

²⁴⁵ *Pallade veneta da sabato 29 agosto a sabato 5 settembre 1716*, in ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 713.

²⁴⁶ Charles-Louis de Montesquieu, *Lettere persiane* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1981), p. 215, letter from Rica to ***.

²⁴⁷ In 1713 Count Giovanni Paolo Bassan invited a *barcarolo* to dress a salad with the oil he was holding, intended to be used to light a holy candle for a saint: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 137, Angela Lorenzoni file, trial against Giovanni Paolo Bassan, spontaneous appearance by Angelo Marinoni on 5 September 1713.

than social class. It was, however, an attempt expressed through the available instruments, namely social inequality and a perceived correlation between the concepts of 'the people' and general ignorance, even though this distinction was sought by members of 'the people' themselves; instead of complaints made in the name of a social class, there was individual vindication of difference from other members of the same class. As I have said previously, nobody in principle questioned the theory according to which politics, knowledge, culture, readings and unbelief were matters for the elect few and that there would be disastrous consequences if they became common property. The common consensus was that it was right for these areas to be separate and protected; secrecy was an essential requirement both for official holders of 'high' knowledge and users of discourse about that knowledge. The fact was that from the mid-seventeenth century onwards an increasingly larger number of individuals felt that they could join the restricted group and therefore become one of those detached from the masses. The implicit agreement was that there were things which others should not speak about, special hidden sectors of knowledge reserved for a few people. More and more people abided by this assumption with regard to others, so the process of exclusion – which formed the basis for a new identification based on discussion and argument – was widely practised but never directed to exclude themselves. In other words: 'Everyone *assumed* the right to speak and think, and this universal self-licensing, punctuated by a repression which did nothing to weaken it, gave rise not so much to new forms of subversion as to a refinement in cognitive and reflective capacities. The originality of this period lies in the forms taken by discussion and criticism than in their actual content.'²⁴⁸

The very fact of developing dangerously deviant ideas and accepting that religion was an instrument of social control made people feel that they belonged to an elite group by right. They attributed terms such as 'ignorant' or 'idiot population' on the basis of a distinction wholly founded on the idea of doctrine regardless of their personal positions. Selection therefore took place mainly based on the image of an educated man that each person tried to apply to himself, changing language and ideas to come across as what was perceived as a social model. 'A large number of great and literate people' told Orsola Ciuran, a junk dealer, that hell did not exist, that the sacraments were ineffective and that the soul was mortal, indeed so many that they were described as 'almost the whole world'. Orsola shared these truths with her fellow tenant Maddalena and 'they both decided to refuse to receive the holy sacraments'²⁴⁹ in an attempt to imitate educated people. 'One really needs to say something in order not to

²⁴⁸ Farge, *Subversive Words*, p. 179.

²⁴⁹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 103, Ludovico Fugarola file, trial against Orsola Ciuran, spontaneous appearance by Antonia Sgambozza on 5 June 1646.

come across as a baboon' was the justification offered by Grando de Grandi in 1692, after he had been reprimanded for suggesting that the soul was mortal and that the hereafter did not exist, along with a personal variation on the imposture of religion.²⁵⁰ Putting forward ideas associated with 'wits' introduced an element of difference, creating distance between the proponent and the 'baboons' who were unable to understand them. It was the same for political news; according to the author of a pasquinade in around 1665, conversations about the news of the world among gentlemen took place 'at unknown hours of the night, speaking a language which cannot be understood by baboons.'²⁵¹

This stance was also in some way connected to the view that books were 'banned to keep the truth hidden, and keep the people in subjection'²⁵² and that bans were only 'for idiots', to use the forthright words attributed to Michelangelo Fardella in 1689.²⁵³ This was a fairly widely used image, put forward, for example, in 1668 by the French Dominican Giovan Battista from Bresse, a staunch supporter of the superiority of temporal power over spiritual power. He said that he 'had no scruples about his fate from reading banned books, and that books are banned for ignorant people and idiots.'²⁵⁴ In 1705 Count Cristoforo della Torre went around saying 'that books are banned for ignorant people who might draw evil from them, but not for the educated, who can distinguish good from evil and for whom it is not a sin.'²⁵⁵ The laughter with which Don Giorgio Capuccio and Marianna Fabris answered a reproach from Marco Dizziani, who believed that banned books should only be read after obtaining a licence, must have been more or less in the same vein. In 1754 Giorgio claimed that 'banned books can be read without a licence, and that the Church only requires a licence so that people submit'. He went on to say that any banned book could be read, 'when it does not ... do harm to the conscience'.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 127, trial against Grando de Grandi, spontaneous appearance by Zanetta de Grandi on 3 September 1692.

²⁵¹ ASV, *Miscellanea atti diversi-Manoscritti*, b. 65, *De gli avvisi di Roma della corrente estate del 1665. Posta prima Pasquino Romano al Gobbo di Rialto*.

²⁵² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 132, trial 'of 5 March', deposition by Antonio Partenio on 8 April 1705, cc. 8r bis.

²⁵³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, trial against Fra' Michelangelo Fardella, deposition by Benedictine Gerardo Mutio on 16 June 1689.

²⁵⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 114, Fra' Giovan Battista da Bresse file, trial against Fra' Giovan Battista, spontaneous appearance by Fra' Daniele Ristiglia on 22 November 1668.

²⁵⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 132, trial 'of 5 March', deposition by Count della Torre on 18 June 1705, before the Inquisitor alone.

²⁵⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 145, trial against Don Giorgio Capuccio, spontaneous appearance by Gaspare Dizziani on 7 March 1754.

The *virtuosi* therefore professed a range of liberties for themselves, first of all in the sphere of thinking, then in reading and finally, almost inevitably, sex. In 1736 Andrea Pisani, a doctor, revisited the stereotype of the *virtuoso* applied not only to heterodox positions but also to sexual liberty. In his opinion 'whoring was not a sin' and he envied the Turks, who could keep a large number of women. If he had been a prince, he would have done it too, but in any case he believed that marriage 'was something for fools, that only ignorant people and idiots get married, and that philosophers and educated people, just as he was a philosopher, never get married but keep several women for their pleasures, because this was not a sin'. After all, 'in the law of nature' men kept several women, because they had been created by God 'for the enjoyment and pleasure of men'.²⁵⁷

Personal forms of dissent were then exhibited in public, put on show so that others could admire them. Beyond any effective adherence to a position, the main focus was on critical ostentation and nothing could achieve this better than comparing one's own opinions with those of others. Discussions and arguments were also governed by their own set of rules: 'at the time I was beside myself because we were in conversation' was how Don Pietro Mariani tried to justify himself in 1679.²⁵⁸ Theological discussion was seen and presented as a kind of free-for-all area where beliefs could be expressed and argued for the pure pleasure of debate. It was a practice in which individuals were allowed to break through the formal veneer of obedience and conformism that people tried to safeguard under normal conditions. The following was a popular anecdote at the start of the eighteenth century: a nobleman and a Jew were having a conversation in St Mark's Square. When the bells rang for midday, the Jew showed no signs of uncovering his head for the customary prayer, at which the nobleman slapped him. Somewhat perplexed, the Jew apologized, saying that as a Jew he did not feel obliged to believe in an outward act. The nobleman replied that he believed in it even less, but that one must never let one's singular nature stand out in public, or ignore what others did.²⁵⁹ As Don Giuseppe Zanchi claimed early in the second half of the eighteenth century,

in order to come across as a practising member of this religion full of make-believe,
in order not to fall into disfavour among those people who under the pretext of

²⁵⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 142, trial against Antonio Pisani, spontaneous appearance by Angelo Mazzon on 21 August 1736. Anti-matrimonial themes were part of libertine trends advocated first by Vanini and then Antonio Rocco, above all in *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*. See Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, p. 165.

²⁵⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 122, trial against Don Pietro Mariani, declaration on 16 July 1680.

²⁵⁹ The episode is in Freschot, *Nouvelle relation de la ville et république de Venise*, p. 281.

defending the cause of God have assumed the right to defend the religion, one can even appear regularly at the confessional, or at the altar receiving the Eucharist. The confessor can be told things of no importance, communion can be received as if it were a stamp for a letter. Those men and women who obey nature without the prejudices of religion live longer and more happily than those who conform and obey the religious precepts and institutions, which are made-up.²⁶⁰

A separation can therefore be detected between a physical act that denoted a lack of belief and words pronounced to the same end. They were not always coordinated and when they were the question moved, sometimes imperceptibly and sometimes more markedly, from the field of heterodoxy to the sector of reasoned and thus heretical blasphemy. There was more concealment in the area of gestures and behaviour than in conversation, unless it was carried out in selecting the times and locations where conversations took place. Therefore, speech and discussion were aspects of social life where one could express oneself, or at least they were believed to be so. In 1651, when Fra' Enrico from Venice heard his fellow brother Tommaso Onorio repeat the entire repertoire of libertine propositions on several occasions, he did not think too much of it, 'thinking that he was saying it for the sake of argument and did not really mean it'.²⁶¹ This was a credible line of defence for most of the accused who appeared before the Sant'Uffizio and there is no reason to doubt the fact that for many it must have really been a pastime or rhetorical exercise which did not necessarily imply adherence to the propositions expressed. 'In a debate one can even question whether God really exists', claimed Fra' Elia Borghi in 1687, 'and light shines better amidst the darkness.'²⁶²

Similar attitudes to those of Menocchio the miller – who frequently told his fellow villagers that he wanted to speak to the authorities about his opinions regarding faith – were fairly widespread.²⁶³ This taste for argument, opportunities to exchange ideas and the agnostic element of thought was defined well by the words of Giovanni Bresciani in the early eighteenth century. He had asked himself questions about divine justice on several occasions and concluded that it did not exist. He soon tired of speaking 'to myself' though, and so:

²⁶⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 148, trial against Don Giuseppe Zanchi, spontaneous appearance by Don Pietro Diedo on 9 June 1760.

²⁶¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 106, Caterina Tordana file, trial against Fra' Tommaso Onorio, deposition by Fra' Enrico from Venice on 15 July 1651.

²⁶² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, trial against Fra' Elia Borghi, declaration on 9 December 1687.

²⁶³ Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, p. 8.

I was extremely tempted by the desire to find an learned man to have a discussion with, and I thought that nobody would be able to convince me and settle my doubts about faith ... therefore I wanted to meet the most learned men in the world, because I had wanted to discuss these things for a long time ... and on other occasions I expressed my doubts to others to put forward some problems.²⁶⁴

Equally, those listening often entertained the desire to compare heterodox ideas with their official equivalents and create a kind of entertaining show. For example, after hearing Trailo Lanzetta, a doctor, question the mortality of the soul in 1661, Antonio Stella, a hosier, invited Father Giovan Francesco Priuli several times to speak to him 'because he's a philosopher'.²⁶⁵ Antonio told of how during their discussions the doctor sometimes said that 'he confessed before the Lord God every evening, and said that men had to be decent, because the Lord God rewards the good and punishes the bad, meaning that everything is used up in this life'. Antonio knew that these were not solid admonitions in keeping with the faith, but 'I said to myself that there were lots of other provident and wise people who knew the life of this doctor' and was left in a state of bewilderment.²⁶⁶

Individuals tended to remember the results of such conversations and were often ready to put them forward again in new contexts. In 1723 Nicolò Rompiasio, who has already been mentioned several times, went on trial at the Sant'Uffizio in Venice for having uttered heretical propositions. Among other things, he had focused on the theme of the 'grace of God', drawing on a conversation with a group of friars in Piacenza in 1709. Tòhey claimed that everything was the grace of God, an idea which he rejected emphatically. The episode is quite meaningful because Rompiasio was so sure of his position that he decided to lay a wager on it. Therefore:

we bet a dinner on it, and I won, because we all went to see a Zoccolante friar, Serafino, who is a Reader in theology at Madonna di Campagna: I asked him if the remedy for a scorpion sting was called 'the grace of God', and the friar replied by saying: it is called the grace of Saint Paul. I turned to the others with whom I had bet the dinner and told them that I had won.

²⁶⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 136, trial against Giovanni Bresciani and Antonio Legrenzi, spontaneous appearance by Giovanni Bresciani on 26 March 1709.

²⁶⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 110, Fra' Fontanarosa file, trial against Troilo Lanzetta, written document by Fra' Giovan Francesco Priuli presented on 28 October 1661.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., deposition by Antonio Stella on 29 November 1661.

In addition to the dinner, Nicolò had gained the conviction that was to accompany him during the years to come and which he wasted no time in developing in a fully heterodox vein.²⁶⁷

This was by no means an isolated case. During the night of 13 March 1710, on seeing Don Osvaldo Tomaia enter Domenico Garagin's *spezieria* in the Calle dei Furlani in Sant'Antonin, Giacomo Penzo had an overwhelming desire to start a quarrel. He asked the clergyman if good deeds carried out for souls in purgatory by someone in mortal sin also help the soul of the person who does them. He thought that they did not, but the priest, who denounced him, unsurprisingly said that they did, adding that if the person in question died in mortal sin, he would certainly go to hell, but with a reduced penalty 'of fire'. At this point Pietro Crescifida intervened, a merchant and known figure – 'he studied and is a scholar' – saying that the penalty of fire did not even come into it, that there was no fire in hell and that it was an invention to frighten children.²⁶⁸ The clergyman tried to put him right as he saw the proposition as false and heretical, but failed to have an impact: 'You're wrong you know, and spoke in a way that mocked what I had said ... and said that he would have a bet with me on the truth of his statement.' Penzo immediately bet on Crescifida, and a certain Filippo wanted to bet with him. Zuanne from Oderzo, an apothecary, joined forces with Crescifida and Penzo. The others present – the *bottega* owner Domenico, Felice Pasquetti, an Armenian called Gregorio and a poor man named Fassina, a boatman – did not get involved and simply enjoyed the show.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 139, trial against Nicolò Rompiasio, declaration by Nicolò on 14 January 1723, c. 27v.

²⁶⁸ '... he said that there was no fire in hell, but only the punishment of the damage of not seeing God, and that it is only said that there is fire to create terror and frighten children.' On the imaginary nature of the pains of hell, a theory of Arab-Aristotelian derivation partly revived by Erasmus – 'Nec alia est flamma ... nec alia supplicia inferorum ... quam perpetua mentis anxietas' – see Robert Klein, 'L'enfer de Ficin', in *La forme et l'Intelligible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), pp. 89–124 and, in general, Daniel P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth Century Discussion of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964); Williams, *The Radical Reformation*; Seidel Menchi, *Erasmus in Italia*. An account of the evolution of the idea from the Antiquity can be found in Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

²⁶⁹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 135, trial against Pietro Crescifida and Giacomo Penzo, spontaneous appearance by Don Osvaldo Tomada on 18 March and deposition by Domenico Garagin on 26 March 1710. This taste, combined with a love of betting, was regularly applied to political discussions. In one of many examples, during the Siege of Vienna in 1683, a Rialto shopkeeper bet 100 gold coins with a *sanser da cambi* (a kind of financial broker) 'that the

To sum up: Giuseppe Zanchi

I will end this chapter by reproducing almost in full a deposition by Angelo Basetta, a *caffetter* (coffee-house owner), with regard to Giuseppe Zanchi, a priest who was working in Venice and its immediate surroundings between the 1640s and 1660s. The deposition seems to provide a good summary of the issues that were discussed at the time and that had been under discussion for at least a century. Although it was only one of many possibilities, I have also chosen it because the *caffetter*, or the clerk at the Sant'Uffizio, had a talent for synthesis and, released from conventions, managed to say many things in a short space of time. The events in question date back to the 1640s, but the themes and language were the same as, or at least very similar to, those that had been there for 100 years.

As in all matters of this kind, Zanchi usually came into his own in public situations and claimed in conversations that:

God does not exist, God is nothing more than Nature, there are no saints, and with these ideas he tried to seduce prostitutes and also some maidens that I don't know, telling them that it was necessary to satisfy natural instincts, because in this way God was satisfied, given that there was nothing else but Nature itself. He said that true happiness consisted of satisfying one's own appetites and inclination. He also said that the soul is mortal, ours is like that of beasts, and that when this life finishes, everything has finished. He then denied the existence of heaven, hell and purgatory. He also said that the sacrament of penitence was invented by men, above all the pope, that he had invented it for political reasons, to keep man distant from nature, and so men and women alike had to pleasure each other in turn, even brothers with sisters and cousins. However, I never heard him speak about fathers and mothers. It was introduced to hold people in check, because the shame of having to confess leads them to abstain from certain sins. For this reason one must not confess, and confessing is typical of ignorant people and the like. He confessed that he did not confess, and ridiculed the Church precepts of compulsory confession, and he would have preferred it if the people he spoke to had never confessed or taken communion, and said that they shouldn't even have to go and pretend to confess and take communion. He also said that the sacrament of the Eucharist was an invention for political ends, made by man and not by God. He claimed that the book of Christian doctrine had been created for children and ignorant people, and that the mysteries contained inside it were

Turks will be masters of the city by the end of July': ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 1 August 1683.

nothing more than make-believe, and that he had written a book himself – which I saw and I know his handwriting well – and in place of the Christian doctrine he had reported all the errors against the faith that I have just listed and others that I don't remember. He had written this book himself, and I remember now that I was present while he was writing a few pages of it, and I saw that he was not copying it from other books, but was writing it directly with things which came from his head. A certain Giuseppina Bonvicini from Brescia was also present ... in whose house I saw him write, and it was a house which he was renting, where that woman lived, in Calle dei Caoli in San Tomà. I don't know where the woman is now. So I wanted to take the book away from him, but I didn't have the opportunity to do so I pretended to agree with him. Another time, however, when I went to his house and found the book on a table, I burnt it as he wasn't there ... but only the woman was present, and she helped me to burn it, happy that it was burning ... When he realized, he came to my house in a fury to take revenge, and I reproached him, and on seeing him fly off the handle I struck him, also using a ruler to measure length. My father was present, but he is now deceased.

Zanchi rejected almost everything connected with religion: its mysteries, Jesus Christ and Mary's virginity. The *caffetter* always tried to convince him to the contrary, but he was obstinate:

so much so that I always believed, at least at the time, that he was a true atheist, also because he said that the world had not been created by God, but that it derived from nature. And when I once replied that there had to be a first cause that had created this world, the sky and the earth, he answered me – we were alone – that I was ignorant, and that everything was the work of nature, and not of God.²⁷⁰

On one occasion he even denied that marriage was a sacrament, seeing it as nothing more than a human invention, to the point where spouses could

²⁷⁰ The question of the eternity of the world had been part of the libertine repertory for some time. The favoured source was probably Diodoro Siculo, *Historia overo libraria historica delle memorie antiche, non pur de' barbari inanzi, et dopo la guerra troiana* (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1574), which pointed out that many of the ancients had believed that the world was incorruptible and had existed since time immemorial. The idea that the world had not been created then became increasingly popular, adopted by Girolamo Cardano, Celio Secondo Curione, Giordano Bruno and Lucretian atomism, which was especially widespread after the 1717 edition of the Italian translation of *De Rerum natura* by Alessandro Marchetti, combined with the question of spontaneous generation that Diodoro Siculo's work brought to the attention of philosophers and scientists. For a primer, see Paola Zambelli, 'From Menocchio to Piero della Francesca. The Work of Carlo Ginzburg', *Historical Journal*, 28 (1985): 983–99 and 'Uno, due, tre, mille Menocchio?.'

‘separate from each other whenever they wanted to, and by abandoning his wife when he was fed up with her, the husband could go and take another wife, and in the same way the wife could go with another man without committing a sin’. On other occasions he asserted that:

in this world we men cannot commit sins, and neither can women, and said that just as beasts do not commit sins, neither do we men. From this he deduced that just as beasts have sexual relations without distinction of husband or wife or relatives or brothers and sisters, men and women could also have sexual relations without distinction of husbands or wives, or brothers, sisters or anything else. And all this without committing any sin, because he said that beasts also had a certain natural use of reason, without saying any more though, so although endowed with reason, men could also do the same things without sinning.²⁷¹

His libertine attitude might have been influenced by the people he associated with. On another occasion Paolo Basetta told how Zanchi used to come to his coffee house every week ‘in the company of a certain Giacomo Casanova, and frequently came out with propositions against the faith’, like the idea that having sexual relations with women was not a sin, that there was nothing else after death or that confession and abstaining from meat of Fridays and before feast days were ‘stupidity’. ‘They discussed these matters among themselves with the above-mentioned Casanova, and others that I don’t remember.’²⁷²

The Sant’Uffizio decided that it would be better to get a deposition from the said Giacomo Casanova. Unfortunately, on 28 May 1761 the *corsore* (court messenger) appeared before the court to report somewhat disconsolately that:

ordered by this holy court to call Giacomo Casanova, nominated as a witness, for interrogation, I used all my diligence in my search, but I did not manage to find him, instead I learnt that this Giacomo Casanova had been imprisoned in the criminal prisons for a number of years, I did not find out how many, and had managed to escape from prison, and it is believed he left the State, and it is not known where he is currently to be found.²⁷³

²⁷¹ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 148, trial against Giuseppe Zanchi, deposition by Angelo Basetta on 28 January 1762.

²⁷² Ibid., spontaneous appearance by Paolo Basetta on 12 February 1761.

²⁷³ Ibid., deposition by *corsore* on 28 May 1761. Casanova had escaped from the Piombi prison on 1 November 1756. See Giacomo Casanova, *Fuga dai Piombi-Il duello* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1989).

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Chapter 4

The Danger from Within

Sighing, Quietism and mysticism adrift

When the Venetian Inquisitor had to deal with the doctrine of ‘susti’ (sighs)¹ in November 1697, he must have been left feeling somewhat perplexed. It had no immediate connections to any other known theory, but bore a strong resemblance to Quietism.² In the climate of general interest in the phenomenon, it was better not to underestimate anything and it was in this way that he learnt about Don Giovan Battista Ruggeri and his way of thinking.³

Don Gasparo Moro, who reported to the Sant’Uffizio on 26 November 1697, had met Ruggeri more than a month before in the Nunciature on the morning of 16 October. Moro was an ecclesiastical lawyer and Ruggeri had engaged him to draw up a memorial to absolve him from the excommunication he had received after punching the subdeacon of San Felice or, as the lawyer put it, ‘because of a blow with a fist inspired by the devil that he gave to reverend father Michiel Moro, head subdeacon at San Felice in the public sacristy of this church’. They went together to see Don Michiel to conclude the peace process but could not find him, and as time was pressing they decided to meet again after

¹ ‘Sigh, deep sigh’, according to the definition in Boerio, *Dizionario del dialetto veneziano*.

² The term and category of ‘Quietism’ were developed in the last 20 years of the seventeenth century in relation to the theories of Molinos and Petrucci. Strictly speaking, it is therefore a term which can only be applied to movements that were consciously inspired by them. Henceforth I have used the term in its broad sense, considering it more as the definition of a feeling than a theory and therefore applying it to manifestations, which when analysed perhaps had little to do with Quietism, but which must have referred to it at least as a historical reference and cultural horizon. Equally, a close examination of Quietism in the Republic alone would be quite another matter in terms of time and place. Here I only want to consider a few aspects that are mainly related to the practical expression of a phenomenon which affected religious life in the Venetian state to varying degrees in its most spurious manifestations.

³ Giovan Battista Ruggeri was also the name of the confessor of Angela Mellini from Bologna, regarding which see Luisa Ciammitti, ‘Una santa di meno: storia di Angela Mellini, cucitrice bolognese. 1667–1700’, *Quaderni storici*, 41 (1979): 603–39. I feel, however, that this is just a coincidence.

lunch. On this occasion they had quite an unusual conversation. Moro noticed that Ruggeri:

let out certain sighs by making non-uniform movements with his face, which prompted me to ask him out of curiosity why he was sighing like this, and he answered that the devil, the witches, torment his mind, and I asked him how it happened, and he answered with these words: like this, like this, smiling as he did it, then this Ruggeri let out an even stronger sigh, and I told him not to sigh, because he would manage to put things right, and Ruggeri replied that that sigh was one of the perfect ones, or rather more than perfect ones.

As he had not understood much of this, the lawyer asked Ruggeri for an explanation, which he seems to have been extremely willing to provide and which I feel should be reproduced here in full:

There are two kinds of sigh, bad ones and good ones; the first kind, he said, are those suggested by the devil because of a fondness for bad things such as love and hate, while the others are those that come via the sacrament of the Eucharist the first time, which is worthily received and is holy bread, with attrition over sins, and whose sighs are the most perfect, like those that come from deep down in the heart, and that after being let out they leave the person's soul noticeably free of guilt, all this without feeling any more pangs of conscience for those sins over which the sigh was let out, and he said that these sighs are great grace given by his God, that is from the Holy Ghost, father and son to those men who are great saints, and he said that those nuns and ladies who are considered to be stranger than the others, when they have this kind of most perfect sigh they are more saintly than any others, so much so that when a man has reached this level of perfection and for grace no longer needs to confess his sins which have been subjected to the most perfect sigh with attrition, he cannot be approached and accused of those sins, for which in this way God has also remitted punishment, and said that these most perfect sighs are actually caused by spiritual oration, which is union with God, and ecstasy with enjoyment of heaven in this life, therefore the most perfect sigh gives all the greatest perfection, even more than the sacrament of the Eucharist, so much so that if someone was about to receive this sacrament and one of these most perfect sighs came to him, he would no longer need to communicate, and the truly great thing about this sigh is that if one committed any serious sin or crime and the most perfect sigh came to him immediately, God would remove the sin and punishment, and said that for this they should take a good look at the princes, at these kinds of men who are great saints, and saintly men, who have the grace of the most perfect sigh when punishing them for their

crimes, and if he was a confessor, when he heard the penitent arrive at that level of grace to have the most perfect sigh, he would definitely not administer the sacrament of penitence, but would only give them a blessing, and said that he had found confessors who had approved the said sigh, and others who had scolded him, and that he was right because this sigh is higher than the authority of the Church, and said that the sacrament of penitence is only when a man's conscience is aggravated by a mortal sin, that is when he only has a perfect sigh, or a more than perfect one, but not the most perfect one, that is when he only has a sigh that does not come from deep down in his heart, but can still feel pangs of conscience for having committed those sins, which are subject to the sighs.

As evidence he took out the first volume of *Delle opere spirituali* by Alonso de Orozco, opened it on page 88 in the chapter 'Some cases where man is obliged to confess immediately' and showed how according to his – to tell the truth somewhat loose – interpretation, a man was not obliged to confess if he did not think he had sinned.⁴ However, he went on cautiously, one had to be careful when talking about those 'graces', 'because those who don't have them are restless troublemakers, they want to know what is inside those who enjoy them, even though they hide in a corner of the house to practise spiritual oration. But what is worse is that they say these things and make them public'. For his part, he did not speak about it to anybody, precisely to avoid this type of problem, but he looked after himself to a certain degree as the 'most perfect sigh' freed him from any moral compulsion. He could therefore feel free to confess his guilt or not. If the 'sigh' came, it was a sign of God's grace, proof that he had reached Him and in some way united with Him. The sin had been removed, or rather did not exist. It was precisely for this reason that he fully upheld his liberty not to divulge to anyone 'what I carry inside me'.⁵

In many respects Ruggeri's position reflected the climate created around silent prayer or 'orazione di quiete', a threat which more than a decade of repressive work by the Inquisition had not been able to restrain and which, as a result of the strengthened position of the followers of Miguel de Molinos, especially in Rome, found new energy and different forms in which to take shape and spread. Indeed, the translation of the Quietist interpretation into an everyday context

⁴ Alonso de Orozco, *Delle opere spirituali del dottissimo, et diuotissimo P.F. Alonso d'Orosco ... Libro primo [-sesto]*, Nuouamente fatto di spagnuolo italiano, per il R.D. Timoteo Nofreschi da Bagno (6 vols, Venice: Domenico, et Gio. Battista Guerra fratelli, 1581). Ruggeri was referring to Chapter XXI of the first volume.

⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 129, trial against Don Giovan Battista Ruggeri, written document presented by Don Gasparo Moro in his spontaneous appearance on 26 November 1697.

was not so much linked to a well-defined doctrine as to the tendency to have personal union with God, a union which could only be achieved through a kind of physical annihilation intense enough to bring the soul close to the divine essence and be absorbed by it. This state of annihilation was 'quiet', a state in which the mind remained inactive, passive in the face of divine will, a state of perfection in which complete absorption in God released one from the need for external manifestations of worship, the sacraments and even prayer.

The achievement of this union through ecstatic contemplation was nothing new. Its most immediate origins were in the Middle Ages, starting with the Parisian Almaricians at the beginning of the thirteenth century and then evolving in different measures in the next century into the Beguine movement, the formulations of Meister Eckhart and the heresy of the 'free spirit'. After their initial popularity in Germanic areas, these forms of mystical unrest then moved to Spain, perhaps in order to blend with similar Middle Eastern influences and give rise during the sixteenth century to the Alumbrados movement, a spectre constantly echoed in the words of Inquisitors and writers of treatises until the mid-seventeenth century.⁶ The nearest example for Italy in both geographical and chronological terms was the Pelagian movement, which developed rapidly in the Brescia area in the 1650s.⁷ Thirty years later the work of Molinos and Petrucci helped Quietism to grow to maturity and gain a solid base among the clergy too, a spread which was only limited by forceful Inquisitorial intervention.⁸

⁶ With regard to the origins and spread of this mystical atmosphere in the Middle Ages, I have considered above all Herbert Grundmann, *Movimenti religiosi nel medioevo. Ricerche sui nessi storici tra l'eresia, gli Ordini mendicanti e il movimento religioso femminile nel XII e XIII secolo e sui presupposti storici della mistica tedesca* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1980).

⁷ On the Pelagians and, in general, Quietist principles in the Republic, see Gianvittorio Signorotto, *Inquisitori e mistici nel Seicento italiano. L'eresia di Santa Pelagia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989); Angelo Turchini, 'Il libro delle "Rivelazioni" di Francesco Negri, detto il Fabianino. Oazione mentale e dispositivi di controllo inquisitoriale nel Seicento veneto', *Annali dell'istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento*, 17 (1991): 379–559. See also Alberto Vecchi, *Correnti religiose nel Sei-Settecento veneto* (Venice and Rome: Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, 1962); Antonio Niero, 'Alcuni aspetti del quietismo veneziano', in *Problemi di storia della Chiesa nei secoli XVII–XVIII* (Naples: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1982); and the considerations in Barzazi, *Gli affanni dell'erudizione*, pp. 43–5.

⁸ On Italian Quietism, in addition to Signorotto, *Inquisitori e mistici*, see Massimo Petrocchi, *Il quietismo italiano del Seicento* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1948) and *Storia della spiritualità italiana* (Turin: SEI, 1996), pp. 184–208. A particularly important work for its attempt to examine the general attitude of the Sant'Uffizio towards mystical manifestations in the light of ample documentation is Adelisa Malena, *L'eresia dei perfetti. Inquisizione romana ed esperienze mistiche nel Seicento italiano* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2003). See also Adelisa Malena, 'Quietismo', in *DSI*, vol. 3, pp. 1288–94; Marilena Modica, *Infetta dottrina. Inquisizione e quietismo nel Seicento* (Rome: Viella,

The general trend was to abolish the boundaries between clerics and laymen in an attempt to make a simple believer become an active participant in his spiritual life. While some typical elements of the Reformation were embraced, apocalyptic threads were also often integrated into the original doctrinal nucleus to varying degrees. From the Church's point of view there was a double danger. First of all, the establishment of a direct relationship with God inevitably marked the end of any institutional mediation. The presence of many priests at the helm of the Quietist movements was mainly an individual initiative by believers, who did not choose leaders according to how religious they were but on whether they possessed exceptional spiritual strength.

In addition, abandoning oneself to God could lead to indifference with regard to moral constraints. Nothing that one did after achieving enlightenment constituted a sin, because it was impossible to sin as part of God. The way in which this attitude had visible repercussions, above all in the field of sexual morality, has been noted. In this respect, the content of *Thérèse philosophe* is not hugely different from the dozens of available trial records from Inquisition courts. Paradoxically, while the intentions behind the practice of silent prayer must have been profoundly pious, it sometimes resulted in a similar outcome to libertine moral indifference and, as we shall see later, built a powerful persuasive argument that unbelievers could also use freely in their attempts to persuade the objects of their desires to yield.

The main problem in tackling the mystical threat was the efficiency with which different elements could merge and spread down through the social fabric because of their ability to offer a variety of equally satisfactory answers to a variety of needs. For example, although some saw the form of atomism that spread throughout the 1680s as a serious threat to the Church because of the materialist view of the universe that it offered, it was really a more limited intellectual movement, at least in the short term, and attempts were made to reduce its influence in universities and academic circles. Quietism, or rather the accumulation of spiritual needs that found a form of expression in that

2009). On some special contexts, see Romeo De Maio, *Società e vita religiosa a Napoli nell'età moderna (1656–1779)* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1971); Romano Canosa and Isabella Colonnello, *L'ultima eresia. Quietisti e inquisizione in Sicilia tra Seicento e Settecento* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1986); and late Italian episodes in Giuseppe Orlandi, *La fede al vaglio. Quietismo satanismo e massoneria nel Ducato di Modena tra Sette e Ottocento* (Modena: Aedes Muratoriana, 1988). For a survey on mystical writing practices, see Elena Bottoni, *Scritture dell'anima. Esperienze religiose femminili nella Toscana del Settecento* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2010). See also Elena Brambilla, *Corpi invasi e viaggi dell'anima. Santità, possessione, esorcismo dalla teologia barocca alla medicina illuminista* (Rome: Viella, 2010) and Sophie Houdard, *Les Invasions mystiques. Spiritualités, hétérodoxies et censures au début de l'époque moderne* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2008).

movement, was to a certain extent the real enemy of orthodoxy because of its ability to penetrate all levels of society, the derivations which it lent itself to and its effectiveness in absorbing different principles and personal interpretations, flourishing as a result. This led to the 'long constant repressive strategy against religious groups, practices and trends' that characterized the work of the Inquisition for a century.⁹

In terms of personal interpretation, for example, Ruggeri certainly did not hold back. He had thought up the doctrine of 'sighs' by himself and was proud of it, but maintained that there were also many others like him, a point which must have alarmed the Inquisitor. The priest said that the numerous people like him were a kind of sect: 'he said that there were lots of them, but he did not know their names, and they could only be recognized by their sighs. They did not meet each other and did not have any head, but they were extremely important and most holy men'. In this way Ruggeri confirmed fears that silent prayer had become widespread, albeit in a hidden, latent way, in the city's social fabric, perhaps also as a result of protection from members of the highest levels of the patriciate. Some alarming rumours reached Venice in 1685 following the arrest of Molinos. Some of his letters were said to contain proof of 'a range of correspondence that this man has with many qualified gentlemen in Venice, and of various conditions, which serves to make the pontiff even more indignant with the Venetians, finding the state of mind and sentiment damned by the Church in it'.¹⁰ In 1687 in Florence a leaflet stated that Venetian noblemen 'are all in that sect'. It even seemed that an official stand had been taken to protest against the way in which Molinos had been treated.¹¹

The position of the Venetian government was clear; it was not so much a question of acting against silent prayer per se, as it could also help raise the moral qualities of the faithful, as one of blocking potentially subversive developments. As a *consulto* pointed out in 1687:

the doctrine of silent prayer, if interpreted correctly, teaches the Christian a special knowledge of God, and to practise it in his perfect love through holy contemplation. However, precisely because it is so sublime, it can easily provoke serious mistakes in religion and in faith, especially if it is not accompanied by internal enlightenment and special help. Indeed, it is difficult to understand in itself, but even more difficult to practise. Besides this it cannot be denied that clear abuse has been created in the Church of God, so that now everybody, even

⁹ Malena, *L'eresia dei perfetti*, p. x.

¹⁰ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 5 August 1685.

¹¹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 24 October 1687.

those most ignorant of divine law and those who do not even know the first elements of Christian living want to be pensive; that is they want to appear like those who have climbed to the highest level of spiritual perfection, living the life of an angel even though they are men, worthy and capable of quietly enjoying the bare presence of that God who opens up heaven on earth to them, making them blessed even before they reach heaven. Saint Bernard defines this contemplation as an elevation of the mind suspended in God and allowed to share in his sweetness.¹²

The problem was therefore as much political as religious and the Venetian government tackled it precisely for this reason, trying everything to dampen its potential subversive power, which was an implicit part of every mystical manifestation and was inherently uncontrollable. Furthermore, given that members of the patriciate were undoubtedly involved, it was normal for the movement to be kept under observation by a secular power. Consequently the Inquisitors of State paid particular attention to the phenomenon. A group of informers was employed to go to churches, observe the different ways in which people worshipped and then report back to the court. Alarming rumours that both Padua and Venice were swarming with Quietists were still going around the city in autumn 1687, the result of the climate of emergency experienced in spring and summer in Rome. This became a topic for discussion and debate and the doctrine consequently spread even further. At the Oratorio dei Filippini at the Fava, one could see ‘many men and women stay at length with their eyes and lips closed in a fixed mode of contemplation’, and penitents who went to those fathers to confess showed an absolute resignation to divine will in their words.¹³

The Inquisitors of State took direct action against the Filippini by admonishing them and banning one of the fathers from hearing confession and carrying out any public practice. Despite this, booklets and leaflets singing the praises of silent prayer continued to be sold around Venice, and it seemed that Quietists were still ‘extremely numerous in the city, and infinite in Padua’.¹⁴

¹² ASV, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, b. 369, consulto dated 1 November 1687.

¹³ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 24 October 1687.

¹⁴ Ibid., report by Camillo Badoer on 9 November 1687. Besides, Venice stood out as a production centre for texts of Quietist origin as well as a consumption centre. Particularly relevant in this sense is the work done by Michele Cicogna for editor Giovanni Giacomo Hertz, with regard to which, see Giuseppe De Luca, ‘Della pietà veneziana nel ’600 e d’un prete veneziano quietista’, in *La civiltà veneziana nell’età barocca* (Florence: Sansoni, 1959), pp. 222–31; Antonio Niero, ‘Alcuni aspetti del quietismo veneziano’, in *Problemi di storia della Chiesa* (Naples: Edizioni Dehoniane, 1989), pp. 233–49; and the critical rereading by Sabrina Stroppa, ‘Le stravaganze della pietà. Giuseppe De Luca e le “letture spirituali”

Indeed, the situation was particularly serious here, to the point where even a bishop like Gregorio Barbarigo was suspected of being infected by heresy, or rather of being 'one of the main heads of this detestable sect and setting a bad example'.¹⁵

The critical phase seemed to have passed by the end of the 1680s.¹⁶ A normalization process had probably taken place under the careful guidance of the secular power, which in any case continued to monitor the Quietist story at close quarters. For example, it was constantly informed about the work of Don Giuseppe Beccarelli, who managed to blend the Pelagian tradition into Quietism at his Oratory in Brescia between the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century.¹⁷ Supported by the noble Martinengo family, he presided over the boarding school that welcomed the offspring of the Brescia nobility and advocated silent prayer, with detachment from the world in order to abandon oneself in God and an ecstatic doctrine similar to that of the Pelagians. He was also accused, perhaps falsely, of 'lascivious touches', an accusation which usually accompanied anti-mystical initiatives. Bishop Gradenigo of Brescia had already asked for information to be collected about his work in the 1690s, following pressure from the Jesuits, but no proper legal action took place until the beginning of the next century.¹⁸

di Michele Cicogna', in Paolo Vian (ed.), *Don Giuseppe De Luca e la cultura italiana del Novecento* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2001), pp. 251–67. See also Barzazi, *Gli affanni dell'erudizione*, pp. 41–4 and Federico Barbierato, 'Giovanni Giacomo Hertz. Editoria e commercio librario a Venezia nel secondo '600 – I', *La Bibliofilia*, 2 (2005): 143–70.

¹⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 548, report by Camillo Badoer on 20 November 1687.

¹⁶ This happened during the very period in which anti-mystical disciplinary action in Italy, significantly later than had happened in Spain, found 'correspondence in terms of doctrinal definition ... with the identification of the mystical heresy *par excellence*, Quietism'. A fixation with this new model led to retrospective Quietist readings of previous cases of deviant mysticism: Malena, *L'eresia dei perfetti*, pp. x, 4.

¹⁷ On the figure and work of Beccarelli see *DBI*, *ad vocem*. Also useful is Cesare Cantù, *Gli eretici d'Italia. Discorsi storici* (3 vols, Turin: Unione Tipografica, 1865–1866), vol. 2, p. 335. Great attention is paid to the social and political context of the Beccarelli affair in Signorotto, *Inquisitori e mistici nel Seicento italiano*, pp. 298ff. More recently, there was a detailed reconstruction of the episode in Marco Faini, 'Eresia e società nella Brescia del primo Settecento. La vicenda di Giuseppe Beccarelli', *Studi Veneziani*, n.s., 46 (2003): 141–83.

¹⁸ 'The Beccarelli affair took place ... at the same time as the affirmation of Quietism, intertwined with the spread of Jansenism and can be placed within the context of the anti-Jesuit movement that increasingly gained in consistency during the eighteenth century': Marco Faini, 'Eresia e società nella Brescia del primo Settecento. La vicenda di Giuseppe Beccarelli', *Studi Veneziani*, n.s., 46 (2003): 141–83, at p. 141. For the accusations, see p. 155.

By the beginning of the eighteenth century the priest's fame had spread outside the city, even reaching female monasteries in Romagna. In September 1704, after receiving letters of denunciation against Beccarelli and concerning the spread of Quietism in Brescia, the Inquisitors of State, 'after collecting information and receiving petitions from certain families from the same city of Brescia, have allowed the priest Beccarelli to hold his meetings'. One of these letters of petition had been sent by Girolamo Martinengo, a nobleman and one of Beccarelli's main protectors:

for the last eighteen years a group has thrived under the leadership of Don Giuseppe Beccarelli, a citizen of the city [of Brescia]. It has educated young people in the city and nearby towns in human learning and knightly virtues, cultivating good morals for the glory of God and the comfort of their parents. This created envy and these envious people brought in the illegitimate son of Count Martinengo, who was expelled from the school for his intemperate behaviour, suited to his impure birth, and also contaminated by the dreadful lies about the innocent Beccarelli told in the holy court of the Inquisition. However, won over by remorse, he went off to a foreign country. His remorse was provoked by a spontaneous appearance in court by Beccarelli himself, who gave proof of his well-known familiar innocence, and continued to hear confession and preach. Nevertheless, as a result of the slander he lost the school, which was closed by supreme order.¹⁹

The initial hesitation in taking action against the group was both a sign that the secular power preferred to proceed with caution on such matters and probably an expression of the desire not to displease important branches of the patriciate in Brescia and Venice. The patriciate had made some use of Molinos's theories, but found Beccarelli's teachings irresistible. He is said to have stated with regard to the theologian 'that the most enlightened souls and the healthiest minds see that Molinos is one of the greatest saints in heaven, that in all ages God has wanted his martyrs, and that one day by dint of miracles he will be canonized'.²⁰

Nevertheless, in 1707 the Sant'Uffizio in Brescia managed to launch a trial, which was then moved to Venice a year later. In the meantime, two edicts issued jointly in Brescia by the bishop and the Inquisitor on 14 July and 12 November 1707 forbade all mystically-oriented meetings in addition to any form of proposition against oral prayer and obliged confessors to spend less time

¹⁹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 523, written document of 6 September 1704.

²⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, trial against Don Giuseppe Beccarelli.

listening to penitents and abandon their habit of asking for total obedience.²¹ It was precisely in the institution of confession that Beccarelli's ideas had found a formidable means of distribution through the custom of confessors guiding and directing mystical expressions.

It was clear that the question had become political in many respects; also in 1707 a certain Luigi Valiselli was sent to the Camerotti prison by the Inquisitors of State for being a 'Jansenist'.²² In May 1708 the Podestà ordered the school to be closed and Beccarelli was arrested at the beginning of June. The unfolding of investigations and the trial attracted the attention of the public, who were able to follow the story both through oral reports, gazettes and the previously mentioned *Pallade veneta*, a newspaper with a relatively high circulation.²³

For his part, Beccarelli played every possible card. Relying on a high level of protection from the civil authorities, he tried everything to have the trial transferred from the Sant'Uffizio to the lay magistracy.²⁴ However, the opinion voiced by the main eighteenth-century Consultore, the Servite Paolo Celotti, did not help him much: the friar ascertained that although charges of a carnal nature were not necessarily a matter for the ecclesiastical court, in Beccarelli's case they could be traced back to matters of faith and so had to be dealt with by the Sant'Uffizio.²⁵ And deal with them it did: on 13 September 1710 Beccarelli was sentenced to seven years in prison.²⁶ The sentence was then commuted by the Consiglio di Dieci, who tried him themselves and sentenced him to life imprisonment on 15 July 1711. Later in 1714 the Inquisitors of State were forced to open a trial 'against Beccarelli's errors'.²⁷

²¹ Signorotto, *Inquisitori e mistici nel Seicento italiano*, pp. 300–301.

²² ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1256, lists of trials.

²³ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 713. See, for example, *Pallade veneta*, 27 September–4 October 1710, and 11–18 July 1711.

²⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, trial against Don Giuseppe Beccarelli.

²⁵ ASV, *Consultori in iure*, b. 472, *consulto* of 20 June 1710.

²⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, trial against *Don* Giuseppe Beccarelli, sentence of 13 September 1710.

²⁷ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1256, lists of trials. As has been noted, 'the anti-mystical choice was the result of a disciplinary rather than a doctrinal initiative' (Signorotto, *Inquisitori e mistici nel Seicento italiano*, p. 32) and in some ways it seems to have been a forced choice for the Venetian government, faced with a potentially widely subversive situation. The Venetian ambassador in Rome, Giovanni Lando, focused on this aspect, giving the government news of Molinos' imminent renunciation: in his opinion he had not only tried to 'destroy the Catholic religion from its foundations ...', but because of the permissiveness towards all actions provided for by this iniquitous doctrine, to eliminate the obedience that people owe the government. Indeed, in the opinion of men who are wise and learned in such matters, the Church of God and the governments have never experienced a more insidious

Shortly before the doctrine of 'sighs' reached the courtrooms of the Sant'Uffizio there had been sudden reawakened interest in Quietism, both as a result of Beccarelli's incipient work and the upsurge in Molinosism experienced in Rome with renewed vigour. Concerned reports had reached the city in 1694 and 1695, prompting the Congregazione of the Sant'Uffizio to meet more regularly in an attempt to find a solution. A series of arrests among 'footmen, coachmen and similar plebeian idiotic people' suggested that they had failed to implement proper disciplinary measures and that there were persistent pockets of widespread resistance to the repressive work of the Inquisition.²⁸ There were, however, contrasting signals. On the same day that the Sant'Uffizio decided to reintegrate Cardinal Petrucci into his Jesi bishopric, the meeting went on late 'because of a certain new sect of Knights of the Apocalypse, some of whose members were arrested on order of the Sant'Uffizio. In the last few months, on order of the Court, a priest from Bergamo called Agostino Caprini [elsewhere Gabrino], who had made this mistake, was committed to the asylum.'²⁹ It was no coincidence that the Knights had come together and operated in the Brescia area, the same territory that had played host to events featuring Pelagianism and contributed to the success of Beccarelli's school.

Don Ruggeri must therefore have seemed like a warning sign, all the more so because the priest's outward manifestations during Mass could potentially reach a vast audience. He persisted in trying to make the priests who celebrated Mass in San Felice understand that there was 'a new Holy Ghost'. Before celebrating, 'he said he wanted to wait for inspiration to come to him', and when it came, 'and he is about to raise the Eucharist, he makes strange gestures and says that he can see angels'.³⁰ The parish priest of the Collegiate Church of San Felice, Don

and devastating heresy than this one, both in terms of spiritual and worldly governing': ASV, *Senato, Dispacci Roma*, f. 200, 30 August 1687, c. 580r. More generally, it was common Venetian political practice to monitor the possible political repercussions of organized dissent: see the previously mentioned *consulto* by Fra' Celso Viccioni, Fra' Odoardo Valsecchi and Antonio Sabini on 21 March 1709: ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 21. This might account for the patriciate's ambivalent attitude towards Quietism: it was widely accepted on a personal level but did not expand into wider areas.

²⁸ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 589, reports by Abbot Chierichelli on 8 May 1694, 7 May and 13 August 1695.

²⁹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 589, report by Abbot Chierichelli on 20 March 1694. There is some information about the Cavalieri dell'Apocalisse (Knights of the Apocalypse) in Cantù, *Gli eretici d'Italia*, vol. 3, p. 332, and Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, p. 366. See also Gaetano Moroni, *Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastica da S. Pietro sino ai nostri giorni* (103 vols, Venice: Tipografia Emiliana, 1840–1879), vol. 2, p. 236.

³⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 129, trial against Don Giovan Battista Ruggeri, spontaneous appearance by Don Gasparo Moro on 26 November 1697.

Giovanni Donà, confirmed that he was undisciplined, saying that when he was told to celebrate Mass from one altar, he could be found at another. However, this was only if he was inspired to do so; he was wont to repeat 'the will lies in the chest' 'and ... we are the new Holy Ghost'. Many said that he had gone mad six or seven years previously when he had lost a few hundred *ducati* while gambling.³¹

The court decided to ascertain for itself and called 45-year-old Don Giovan Battista Ruggeri to testify on 25 February. If they thought he was mad because he felt 'sighs', then something did not add up, because he had been feeling them for 12 or 13 years, well before his gambling loss. He made things clear from the beginning, providing the Inquisitor with a practical demonstration when asked if he had ever heard talk of sighs:

I consider these sighs to be a good thing, and thanks to the help of God, since I came here before you, two or three have come to me. They start from the stomach, and from inside the body, and I believe that it is the Holy Spirit, because it is inside us just as it is inside all creatures. It is a matter of faith, and I have never felt anything more holy than this.

It was certainly not normal for the Inquisitor to find someone before him willing to state and even explain the crime he was accused of. There is no doubt that Ruggeri knew he had been called to the Sant'Uffizio because of the 'sighs', which had already caused him problems with colleagues and confessors on several occasions, so he must have seen it as a good opportunity to confront an authority. In any case, as far as he was concerned the external court was only of secondary if not negligible importance. He therefore did absolutely nothing to hide the truth and even made some effort to try to persuade those present. The resulting lecture was reminiscent of the one he had given to Don Gasparo Moro in terms of its tone and motifs. It was even didactic in nature:

if someone was not in God's grace, with these sighs his soul would be freed of sin. I really believe that these sighs release us from guilt and punishment alike, as long as they are absolutely perfect and come from the grace of God. I consider it to be something certain, so much so that if I committed a mortal sin and one of these sighs came to life inside me, providing that it was one of the right ones which are absolutely perfect, I would not need to confess or be absolved. And with God's help, upon death I would go straight to heaven. And this sigh also frees us from excommunication: I had punched a priest and they said that I had incurred excommunication, but deep inside I did not feel affected by it, because

³¹ Ibid., deposition by Don Giovanni Donà on 14 January 1698.

I believed that the other priest had been excommunicated. In any case as a result of the sigh I freed myself from the excommunication, even though in order to satisfy the others I then received absolution from a priest with regard to the sin, and from a highly distinguished patriarch Monsignor with regard to the external court. This patriarch gave me a blessing while I was walking along the street, as he usually does, and with this blessing I felt that I was absolved in the external court, so I then celebrated and I continue to celebrate whenever I have the opportunity to do so.

There was an overwhelming distance between the internal and external courts. The external court was concerned with appearances, and he only respected it inasmuch as he was bound to do so for a quiet life, not because he recognized that anyone had enough hierarchical pre-eminence to be granted the authority to forgive or erase sins. He felt that this opportunity lay in the 'sigh', which was both a sign and means of divine benevolence. This reversal of causal relations followed its own logic, just like Ruggeri's arguments. He was careful, however, not to make explicit references to the direct consequences of this separation of the courts, namely the merely conventional aspect of external actions as human inventions established to control behaviour. He experienced things in a very different way as he felt the will of God.

It was inevitable that he brought this widespread Quietist-influenced sentiment to its extreme consequences and could not have been clearer when he said that:

these sighs fill the soul with spiritual oration, which is mixed prayer that leads the soul to join with God, on the basis of what has happened to me since I started experimenting with these sighs ... and the soul definitely cannot attain greater perfection, to the point where it exceeds the perfection conferred by the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist, which contains the body and blood of Christ our Lord, with the attributes and substance of bread and wine, even after consecration. In this way if someone was about to take communion and experienced an absolutely perfect sigh, he would not need to do it anymore, because he would obtain more grace from the sigh than can be obtained from the most holy sacrament.

His argument was blasphemous to some extent but consistent, because it established hierarchies of importance between an internal act that became external such as the 'sigh', an expression of God, and an external act that purported to become internalized like the Eucharist. He was, however, shrewd enough to say that he had never spoken about his 'sighs' to anyone except a confessor, 'who, however, did not deem them to be right'. This was on the basis

of *his* books, however, and certainly not on the basis ‘of mine, of which there are two, namely the Flores Casum Conscientiae by Fenech and the Spiritual Works of Father Alfonso Dorosto’.³² These clearly did not ‘really’ contain the doctrine of ‘sighs’, ‘but they are about prayer, and the grace of God, but then with the grace of God inside me I extracted the doctrine of sighs’. Seeing how Ruggeri’s thought process worked, implicating God as an accomplice could well have been a defensive strategy. He was just as careful to underline how ‘I well imagine that God dispenses this grace to many others, but I don’t know them, or know who they are, neither has anyone ever spoken to me about them’.³³

There was therefore supposedly a sizeable group forming a kind of invisible church populated by ‘great suggestions’, to use Ruggeri’s expression. Despite all this, the Inquisitor decided not to lend too much weight to what he must have seen as the words of a madman and let him go, warning him to avoid discussing similar matters in the future and banning him from celebrating Mass.³⁴

Other characters who were in some way similar passed through the Venetian court in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a sign that some Quietist principles were circulated fairly widely and enjoyed discreet success, albeit in a concealed form.³⁵ However, in the Sant’Uffizio records these elements often appear disconnected rather than homogeneously coordinated into a way of thinking. They often did not indicate any knowing affiliation with any group or proposition of faith; everything lay in their personal formulations. From this point of view it was quite difficult to discover where an individual had drawn his or her beliefs from. Those who said that they did not believe in the intercession of the saints, labelling such beliefs as idolatry, might have been inspired by Reformation arguments, but it was just as plausible – at least in the eyes of an Inquisitor – that they were referring to Quietist doctrine. Withdrawal into God meant that it was pointless to use intermediary figures; indeed, they were seen as an obstacle, a barrier erected between the soul and divine essence. In this way the

³² The work in question was Joannes Lucas Fenech, *Flores casuum conscientiae ex selectis et probatissimis doctoribus decerpti ...; in hac 5. ed. ab ipso auctore recogniti et singulari tractatuvariorum casuum ac quam plurimorum additamentorum accessione ampliati auctore Joanne Luca Fenech. Isidorus Vertino. Accessere hac ultima editione Decreta Alexandri VII, Innocentii XI et Alexandri VIII cum propositionibus damnatis* (Cologne: Friessem, 1692), a reissue of *Casuum moralium ... flores*, printed for the first time in Venice in 1669. The ‘Spiritual Works of Father Alfonso Dorosto’ is the previously quoted Orozco, *Delle opere spirituali*.

³³ ASV, Sant’Uffizio, b. 129, trial against Don Giovan Battista Ruggeri, deposition by Don Giovan Battista Ruggeri on 25 February 1698.

³⁴ Ibid., session on 25 February 1698.

³⁵ There are a few cases in Romano Canosa, *Storia dell’Inquisizione in Italia dalla metà del Cinquecento alla fine del Settecento* (5 vols, Rome: Sapere 2000, 1987), vol. 2, pp. 142ff.

Virgin Mary, the saints and Christ's human nature were denied. A fair number of the doctrines included under the definition of Quietism were therefore liable to be interpreted as remnants or repeated proposals of Reformation elements or forms of libertinism.³⁶ Quietist positions could also be reached by following a path that took account of formulations which, as we have seen, found an established way to become part of public discussions. It was possible not only to trace influences on a daily basis but also to confirm them on the basis of different theories which must, however, have sounded similar. The doctrine of justification by faith, for example, suited the passivity of Quietism and was easily amalgamated into it. Equally, the trend of turning religious life into a strictly personal affair, implying a single relationship between the individual soul and God, must have seemed fairly similar to Calvinist positions. In this way individuals found familiar aspects in Quietist formulations, thereby blending discourses of different origins to reach a single conclusion.

The Protestant model was not the only one to provide influences; there seemed to be meaningful connections, at least in terms of the conclusions reached, between Quietist and libertine discourses. As Paul Hazard underlined, libertinism and Quietism almost coincided in their practical effects on the development of the crisis of the European conscience, as Quietism also disavowed, although in a completely different way and extent from libertine criticism:

the alliance between religion and authority, and, throwing off the bonds of orthodoxy and regarding religion as the spontaneous uplifting of the individual soul to God, it too played, on its own account, the part of innovator. While all this was going on in select religious circles, another parallel process was at work in the world at large. The door had been opened to anarchy by those who held up to contrast the virtues of the primitive, untutored savage on the one hand, and the errors and crimes of civilization on the other.³⁷

As with the libertine criticism of religion, for Quietism it was also accepted that it could result from individual and not broader collective choice. In this respect the patriciate could willingly accept that some of its members practised and supported silent prayer on an individual basis, but in terms of safeguarding

³⁶ In *Nuovo dizionario scientifico e curioso* by Giovan Francesco Pivati, published between 1746 and 1751, Jansenism, considered to be one of many aspects of Quietism, was still overlapped with Calvinism, of which it was only a late camouflaged form. See Mario Infelise, 'Enciclopedie e pubblico a Venezia a metà Settecento. G.F. Pivati e i suoi dizionari', *Studi settecenteschi*, 16 (1996): 161–90, at 174.

³⁷ Hazard, *The European Mind*, p. 12.

order and civilized life it was not a tolerable situation for society to be preyed on by mystical deviation. It all became more complicated as a result of the fact that libertine and Quietist themes were combined, producing singular effects of the amplification or aggregation of ideas. At the beginning of the eighteenth century a certain Francesco Cristofoli, a *santer da cambi* and known supporter of Beccarelli's doctrine, was working in Venice. Francesco's stance on religious matters was especially well known in mercantile sectors. The ideas he put forward were characterized by a tone that brought to mind both inspiration from Beccarelli and a curious blend of different elements partly drawn from the libertine tradition, from whose vocabulary he certainly borrowed. He suggested, for example, that 'the Catholic religion was introduced by princes for political reasons, a sign that the princes themselves allowed the Turks and the Jews to live in their countries, so that everyone could propagate his religion'. As for the cross, he saw it as pure invention, given that it had been found 40 years after Christ's death, and he answered those who pointed out to him that the term 'invention' should be understood in the sense of 'discovery' by mentioning other improbable 'inventions', in particular St Stephen's vision of heaven.

He saw the best proof of the truth of his beliefs in the approval that he felt he encountered around him and from the fact that he supported propositions which he deemed to be socially validated. He sustained that 'there were many people who spoke in this way ... and that he had been taught to do the same'.³⁸ There must have been people speaking in those terms as different types of heterodox unrest had become widespread, as we have seen. In 1702 a penitent whose confession was usually heard by Agostino Gozzi, an Agostinian in the monastery of Santo Stefano, described her confessions as follows:

he exhorted me to pray mentally, as he has always continued to do ... and speaking about the oral praying that I usually did – such as *Padre nostro*, *Per la cintura di san Francesco*, *Ave Maria*, the *Credo* and the Rosary – ... he told me: I don't think at all highly of these prayers of yours, I consider these prayers of yours to be like the menstruation you experience every month. I have nothing to say about them, I don't consider them to be anything, and don't stand there telling me about these prayers of yours ... and he encouraged me by saying that I should apply myself to contemplation. I asked him how to do it and he said: stay in the presence of God. He said that I had to meditate, and raised in contemplation, after becoming fervent, I had to say litanies as if I was speaking to my fiancé.

³⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 137, Antonio Cristofoli file, trial against Antonio Cristofoli, spontaneous appearance by Francesco Turconi on 9 August 1714.

The images used by the friar and his subsequent attitude – he tried to seduce penitents and must have had a reputation which was at best dubious, as a noblewoman impregnated by a servant turned to him for help in having an abortion – suggest that doctrine had been acquired selectively in this case too. Although not always in such a spurious and somewhat vulgar form, some Quietist elements must have been circulating clinging to ideas and formulations that had deviated away from their original doctrinal focus completely. In any case the penitent in question, Paolina Mussati, did not lack the tools for self-education in this respect, as she owned a book, the *Vie della contemplatione* by Father Cucchi, which was praised by the friar and burnt by the Inquisitor.³⁹ These attitudes and influences must have been fairly widespread. In 1710, for example, while trying to break down a woman's defence system, a certain Don Giacomo Toneghelli explained 'that in that act you must keep your mind in God, so as not to offend God or sin.'⁴⁰

Among the many worries aroused by Quietism, the possible repercussions of its doctrinal arguments on the field of discipline and most of all on sexual behaviour were at the forefront. From this point of view, accusations of Quietism were often accompanied by allegations of carnal practices and solicitation in the confessional, while the physical relationship between penitent and confessor was equally often used in a functional way for an accusatory rhetoric that attempted to establish explicit connections between lasciviousness and Quietism. The attitude of ecclesiastical institutions undoubtedly contributed to flawed perspectives; an assumption that the sexual aspect, an omnipresent part of trials of this kind, was a central feature of Quietism sometimes led to the implicit adoption of the inquisitorial vision which aimed to associate Molinosism with masking libertine-style sexual practices.⁴¹ The fact remains

³⁹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 130, abate Menoncour file, trial against Fra' Agostino Gozzi, spontaneous appearances by Paolina Mussati on 16 and 31 March 1702. The official records state 'Lucchi' instead of Cucchi. Nevertheless, I believe the reference is to Sisto Cucchi, *Vie della contemplatione* (Venice: Paolo Guerigli, 1623).

⁴⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 135, spontaneous appearance by Laura Diana on 21 January 1710. Giovanni Apollonio, a priest from Bassano, went even further as the confessor of a group of women 'who stay celibate despite their advanced age and are called Scarpone'. In 1693 'trying to persuade them to satisfy him, he let them believe that carnal union was necessary to raise the spirit towards God, and ... acted in such a way that those souls believed that they should lie with him, imagine him as the baby Jesus and themselves as the Virgin mother, thereby establishing a Trinity, and other similar things always with the same objective': ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 11, letter to the Senate from the Podestà of Bassano, Giulio Grimani on 17 September 1693.

⁴¹ Adelisa Malena's reflections are particularly explicit in this respect. In her opinion, the central role played by accusations of a sexual nature against the Quietists offers 'a macroscopic

though that there were relatively few trials for Quietism in Venice compared to the number of stories of disciplinary infractions and solicitation in the confessional that came out of the city and the rest of the Republic. It is possible that the Venetian government's tendency to exert increasingly close control over the Inquisition played a decisive role in this respect; letting a trial for solicitation – or simply for sexual relations between confessor and penitent – evolve into an accusation of Quietism effectively meant leaving proceedings in the hands of the Sant'Uffizio. Therefore, even when faced with 'some Quietist impulses', the Senate was always careful to lay claim to cases of solicitation in the confessional that did not involve abuse of a sacrament or which, as in the Beccarelli case, would have seriously complicated relations with Rome.⁴² The fact that pseudo-mystical arguments were being circulated could therefore provide conceptual tools that some might have seen as sufficient justification for all kinds of moral indifferentism. Others, in particular clerics, were instead supplied with excellent persuasive arguments; scruples and doubts of a sexual nature should be forgotten and not even mentioned during confession. This was the line often taken at the time by confessors who enjoyed or solicited sexual relations with their penitents. The latter were certainly not under any obligation to repeat 'trifles' of this kind in confession, especially if it was to another confessor.⁴³

The fact, per se, that some friars and priests had sexual relations or tried to have them was unpleasant, but it was also a disciplinary matter as they were certainly not setting a good example: 'Priests and friars womanize, if it isn't a

example of how the strategies of repressive institutions and their way of producing a memory can influence the historical evaluation', given that many historiographical interpretations show a marked adherence to the Inquisition's stance: Malena, *L'eresia dei perfetti*, p. 18.

⁴² The Senate – and consequently the Consultori in Iure – had to deal with dozens of similar cases. See, purely by way of example, ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, ff. 4 (27 August 1678); 6 (8 July 1682); 9 (18 March 1690 and *consulto* on 17 January 1691); 10 (20 December 1692); 11 (14 March and 26 September 1693); 13 (9 June and *consulto* on 18 April 1696); 16 (30 May 1699); 19 (*consulto* on 15 February 1707); 53 (19 March 1740). Some of these episodes were analysed by Michela Miraval in 'Celibato e sessualità degli ecclesiastici nella Venezia del Seicento', *Studi Veneziani*, n.s., 58 (2009): 177–217.

⁴³ Various Venetian cases of solicitation to carnal sin in the seventeenth century are analysed in Claudio Madricardo, 'Sesso e religione nel Seicento a Venezia: la sollecitazione in confessionale', *Studi veneziani*, n.s., 16 (1988): 121–70. The issue has also been dealt with more generally in Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, pp. 508–42. See also, for Spain, Stephen Haliczer, *Sexuality in the Confessional: A Sacrament Profaned* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). The offence of solicitation was not strictly linked to sexual relations between penitent and confessor, but was more generally applied to any solicitation by the priest to try to convince the penitent to sin with anyone. In this respect, any topic of a sexual nature became a potential risk.

sin for them, it isn't a sin for me either' was how Giovan Battista Ospedaletti, a domestic servant from Cremona, justified himself in 1711.⁴⁴ The real danger was not so much in the act as in the ways in which clerics tried to persuade the objects of their attentions to yield and the arguments they used to do so. After the act itself, these sometimes survived to become part of personal doctrinal packages, be transmitted to others and interact with other ideas such as the imposture of religion in order to give a widely documented example. It was no longer only a question of a sin dictated by instinct, but a possible subversive element of the doctrine as soon as it was theorized and its essence was distilled. 'Pay attention to what they said, they know more than us, as we are ignorant', said Lucrezia Chioldela to her sister, Maria, after having received a visit from a priest who defended the legitimacy of the sexual act for anybody. He specified that sins only existed when they were believed to be so: 'when you believe it's a sin, then it's a sin, because even if you spit on the ground and believe it to be a sin, then it is a sin.'⁴⁵ On the other hand, there was good reason to trust them; the social role of clerics put them in a privileged position to judge whether something was a sin or not, and they were authorities of reference in the field.⁴⁶ Fourteen-year-old Lucrezia Lessi revealed in 1680 that she had not thought that sexual relations were a sin after having been reassured on the matter by her confessor, who wanted to win her over, 'and because I was a young girl of 11 or 12 and he was a priest and confessor I believed what he told me.'⁴⁷

In 1665 Don Girolamo Rossi, who had become the confessor to the nuns of Santa Giustina, concealed his sexual relations through the opportunity to exorcize some of them. He prepared the ground during confession, trying to persuade them with affectionate words and saying that he 'had no scruples about the things that happened between him and me, because if he believed that

⁴⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 135, Ospedaletti file, trial against Giovan Battista Ospedaletti, spontaneous appearance by Giovan Battista Campigni on 8 May 1710.

⁴⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 131, trial against Don Francesco Confalonieri, spontaneous appearance by Maria Chioldela on 14 August 1704. The priest's words persuaded Lucrezia above all and she agreed to put the teachings into practice. The priest did not fail to teach the pair that the pope was a man like any other and was therefore fallible, and that one had to listen to the Commandments alone, ignoring all the ecclesiastical frills.

⁴⁶ Naturally, this technique was not restricted to priests and friars, and also depended on the proponent's assertiveness and persuasive skills. In 1709, for example, a Roman nobleman in Venice persuaded 15-year-old Caterina Palma by repeating forcefully twice 'for God it is not a sin'. The girl was convinced and held the opinion 'for some time' until her confessor persuaded her to report everything to the Sant'Uffizio, or 'Santo Servizio' as Caterina called it: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, spontaneous appearance by Caterina Palma on 14 March 1709.

⁴⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 123, Angela Soave file, trial against Fra' Antonio Travasa, spontaneous appearance by Lucrezia Lessi on 13 July 1683.

people could see inside him, he would have done the same things, even in the middle of the square, because he knew that he did them with a good purpose'. The nun in question, Sister Marina, was told to have no qualms about 'loving him too much', also because, in Rossi's opinion, the situation in Venice was special: 'elsewhere – and I think he mentioned Naples – there isn't so much narrow-mindedness, and everybody is allowed to touch and kiss hands'.⁴⁸

Therefore, beyond the disciplinary aspect, statements such as these led to greater exposure for themes that were difficult to control but easy to assimilate and re-interpret. Some even felt the need to provide their words with a historical basis, retaining that the justification offered by what passed for the Quietist repertoire was not enough.⁴⁹ In 1698, for example, Don Bartolomeo Pinzani often found himself in the company of a group of women to talk 'about sense'. He must have been quite insistent, as Lucietta Zamolin, a direct witness, claimed that the priest 'did not want to have anything but this'. In order to persuade her and the others that it would not be a sin to have sexual relations with him, he explained that Carlo Borromeo was the only person who had opposed marriage for priests at the Council of Trent, 'and that Saint Peter had been married, and had had children, and that God had not forbidden him to marry ... and that even Saint Paul told priests that if they were not able to live chastely, they should at least do it cautiously'. He argued with convincing logic, drawing on the device of the rhetorical question: who could be mistaken, God or the pope? 'Certainly not God, so the pope, because God has never told a lie.' For their information he explained that the mistake was due to ill-concealed envy, 'because he is usually old, that if he were young, he would behave like us too'. On other occasions he explained his thinking by clarifying his comments. While sexual relations between 'an unmarried man and an unmarried woman' did not constitute a sin according to the usual formulation, adultery on the other hand did. Therefore, if a priest or friar had sexual relations with a married woman, it was the woman who committed the sin rather than him.⁵⁰ In this order of ideas the priest finished

⁴⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 113, trial against Don Girolamo Rossi and Giovan Battista Angeloni, cc. 17r–v, deposition by Sister Marina on 8 July 1665. As usual, the nun's surname was crossed out in the records. Nevertheless, 'Bragadin' can still be made out.

⁴⁹ According to Madricardo, 'Sesso e religione nel Seicento a Venezia: la sollecitazione in confessionale', p. 146, there is not a clear connection between the spread of Quietism and *sollicitatio ad turpia*. Nevertheless, the author does not exclude it either. Rather than a connection, I believe that it is easy to identify the use of Quietist arguments by solicitors. It is difficult to establish precisely whether they then demonstrated the spread of deep-rooted beliefs and Quietist feelings or conceptual tools that could be used for practical ends.

⁵⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 129, trial against Don Bartolomeo Pinzani, spontaneous appearance by Lucietta Zamolin on 15 July 1698. In 1717 the parish priest of the church in Limana, near Belluno, also claimed that the inclusion of the sexual act on the list of sins

by more or less knowingly embracing the doctrine of the political use of religion, perhaps superimposing it over the Quietist idea that exterior ceremonies and rules should be observed, while interior life was a matter for each individual. As an act and social institution, marriage would be put in danger by adultery and so an infraction that could damage the social order constituted a sin which was punished by the Church. On the contrary, a sexual act between two individuals only concerned the two people and nobody else, so the Church was not entitled to play any role.

Pinzani's speeches were long and circumstantial, developed with rhetorical devices that showed off his knowledge of Scripture to those listening, although it was not always accurate. His use of historical evidence by referring to the Council of Trent gave his arguments greater solidity and his persistent use of one-answer questions led the object of his persuasion to the persuader's ground, forcing her to reason with his categories and accept his position of supremacy. In as late as the 1760s Don Cristoforo Venier tried to break down a female believer's resistance by claiming 'that it is not a sin to break the sixth commandment, for the reason that if God had forbidden it, he wouldn't have given the stimuli that cause this rule to be violated'.⁵¹ The sexual issue also played an extremely important role for our old Carmelite acquaintance Fra' Elia Borghi, who was in Venice from the end of the 1670s and solved the dilemma using similar terms. In his opinion 'the vow of chastity of clerics doesn't hold, as it is greater than human forces'. He consequently did not believe that 'simple fornication' was a sin, a stance which was the result of misunderstanding Moses' words '*non mechaberis*, because this must be understood as adultery and not simple fornication'.⁵² While in the 1680s the renowned Michelangelo Fardella seems to have distanced himself somewhat from pseudo-Quietist arguments by claiming the invalidity of the

was connected to the Council of Trent. Indeed, it seems that he said that 'simple fornication has only been a sin since the Council of Trent, therefore before the same Council the said fornication was not a sin, and that at the same Council of Trent [the motion] that fornication was a sin was only passed by one vote'. He shared this with his parishioners: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 138, don Vincenzo Santoro file, trial against Don Giovan Battista Carrera, spontaneous appearance by Don Giovan Battista Vastalegna on 6 April 1717. The parish priest measured himself against Vastalegna regarding his beliefs, with biblical texts to hand, claiming among other things that priests were fully entitled to marry and that married men could become priests.

⁵¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 148, trial against Don Cristoforo Venier, spontaneous appearance by Maria Teresa Bollani on 14 February 1769.

⁵² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, trial against Fra' Elia Borghi, spontaneous appearance by Fra' Nicola Zanolini on 21 January 1687 and deposition by Fra' Tommaso Zelis on 23 January 1687.

vow of chastity 'as against the law of nature',⁵³ in around 1705 Antonio Partenio posed the terms of the question in a more earthly way less bound to principles: ecclesiastical prohibitions simply did not work and produced no other effect than an increase in the opportunities and desire to sin. Therefore, in his opinion, fornication should be considered perfectly legitimate, as marriage was really no more than 'authorized fornication'.⁵⁴

Clerics and heterodoxy

The problem of Quietism or rather the problem of Quietism in its most corrupted forms and their immediate repercussions on a disciplinary, moral and sexual level led to the realization that the dangers that believers faced were as much inside the Church as outside. Fundamentally, Quietism flourished in the Catholic conscience in a hidden and often unrecognizable form when necessary, taking manifestations of inner piety to the extreme. As it had also largely been spread by clerics, it became increasingly clear that not even the places where orthodoxy was supposed to be developed were safe from heterodox penetration. In 1715 two *setaioli* (silk weavers), who taught Christian doctrine to children in the parish of San Nicolò dei Mendicoli, were persuaded by one of their weaver colleagues, Giovanni Maria Urbani, that there was no need for baptism as the Virgin Mary had been saved 'without being baptized, and that to be saved it was only necessary to observe two precepts, namely to love God and love thy neighbour, and that even the Jews were saved without baptism by observing the same precepts'. The priest who taught Christian doctrine to adults in the same parish had to intervene to convince them of the contrary and to challenge Urbani's claim that 'the Gospel was not written by Christ, but by some wits'. He had probably heard these ideas from a fellow tenant who had denied the existence of life after death and any other world besides the material one.⁵⁵

⁵³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, trial against Fra' Michelangelo Fardella, spontaneous appearance by Don Filippo Caminetti on 28 April 1689.

⁵⁴ I do not know if he saw any consequentiality, but Antonio developed his own theory according to which Adam and Eve had had sexual relations against nature: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 132, trial 'of 5 March', deposition by Antonio Partenio on 8 April 1705, cc. 8r *bis*.

⁵⁵ One of the weavers, 50-year-old Girolamo Bellocchio, approached the priest, Don Antonio Faiferi, one Sunday in December 1715 after the doctrine lesson for adults. Although he taught children, Girolamo also attended Don Antonio's lessons 'as I still needed instruction'. The priest had spoken about baptism and Girolamo warily made him understand using 'coarse terms' that he had a few difficulties on the subject, explaining what he had learnt from Urbani, or rather not directly from him but from his friend Matteo Rizzato, who had referred Urbani's words to him. The priest had to repeat his explanation to

The danger was therefore everywhere and was especially difficult to fight when it came from precisely those who should have restrained it through their pastoral work. One such individual was Fra' Lodovico Molin, a Zoccolante (Franciscan friar), who was employed as a spiritual guide to the 14-year-old commoner Margherita Marcuzzi in the 1720s. He taught her not to believe in the Trinity, 'but that there was only one person, namely the Father, and only one God, adding that only the Father had created the world'.⁵⁶ In itself the idea did not make too much impression on Margherita, as some time before she had heard the same thing from another friar from the same order, who had told her 'that I mustn't believe anything about the Incarnation, and that believing in this mystery is total madness'. She had not given it too much weight, but after listening to Lodovico's words and combining the elements she showed herself willing to follow the friar in his successive teachings.⁵⁷

These teachings provided a complete course in unbelief. First of all, the friar told the girl not to worry too much about her virginity, given that God much preferred marriage – and marriage was clearly an extremely generous term to define sexual relations of any kind – to chastity. To demonstrate this he revealed his personal cosmology, which did not fail to have an effect on Margherita's imagination:

he told me that it is not true that there is only one heaven, but that there are seven heavens, in the first of which is God alone, to which we do not go even if we are good, confessors go to the other subsequent ones, all married people go to the sixth one, along with all those who are not married and have children, and in the

adapt it better to the abilities of Girolamo, who for his part showed himself willing to take it in. The ease with which such theories managed to take root in two completely pious spirits seemingly incompatible with heterodoxy, furthermore employed to teach Christian doctrine and educate children in a parish in keeping with these principles, gave Don Antonio cause for concern. He not only took it upon himself to monitor the education of the two friends but also tried in vain to arrange a meeting with Urbani so that he could refute him. The latter's abilities to convert people were probably increased by the fact that he held a *ridotto* – a kind of Academy – in his house on Sundays with a large confluence of people. Faced with a frightened refusal, Don Antonio decided to turn to the court, but the investigation was not continued after the two weavers had been interrogated: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 138, trial against Giovanni Maria Urbani, spontaneous appearance by Don Antonio Faiferi on 3 March 1716 and depositions by Girolamo Bellocchio on 6 March 1716 and Antonio Rizzato on 10 and 27 March 1716.

⁵⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 140, trial against Fra' Lodovico Molin, spontaneous appearance by Margherita Marcuzzi on 20 August 1726.

⁵⁷ Ibid., spontaneous appearance by Margherita on 12 September 1726.

last one, the seventh one there are all the virgins, and from this he concluded by saying that virginity was less pleasing to God than marriage.⁵⁸

Although the friar's stance might suggest that he had a certain carnal interest in Margherita, she never referred to any attempts at seduction during her numerous appearances in court. The things that he taught her, or rather the things that she learned, were closely connected to the devotional aspect of her life. Indeed, it must have been easier for her to translate thoughts into actions rather than proceed with abstract reasoning; in this way she learned that the Eucharist was a meaningless rite as Incarnation was impossible. Her spiritual guide urged her to experiment, so she duly took communion without having fasted and defiled the Host by wrapping it in a handkerchief after receiving it. According to Molin:

the Church wants and commands that the person taking holy communion has fasted, and if he takes communion without fasting, he commits a terrible sin, for which he deserves to be punished by holy God, adding that before taking me to holy communion I had to have something to eat, and then without fasting take holy communion; if God punished me immediately after taking communion in this way, it would be a sign that the body and blood of Christ our Lord were really in the consecrated Host, and if He did not punish me immediately, it would be a sign that the body and blood of Christ our Lord were not there, repeating to me that Christ our Lord was absolutely not in the consecrated Host, but that the Church taught it even though it was not true ... Immediately after receiving the holy Host in my mouth, I had to spit it out into my handkerchief: if God punished me immediately, it would be a sign that the body and blood of Christ our Lord were in the consecrated host, and if He did not punish me immediately, it would be a sign that the body and blood of Christ our Lord were not there.

After carrying out the experiments and 'seeing that I wasn't punished by Holy God, I started to believe in bad things'. Everything now appeared to her as an invention, a form of imposture. Even Christ's genealogy, the fact that he was born of a virgin, seemed implausible to her.⁵⁹ The ability to doubt through mastery of a suitable vocabulary and tools – however crude they may have been – must have

⁵⁸ Ibid., spontaneous appearance by Margherita on 20 August 1726.

⁵⁹ Ibid., spontaneous appearance by Margherita on 27 August 1726. The custom of spitting out the Host and keeping it as a charm, *agnus dei* or element for magic rites was quite common. In addition to being an essential component of the advanced domestic magic repertoire – it was always an act that involved sacrament abuse – it seems that it was also a common habit among prisoners and soldiers, according to the testimony to the Sant'Uffizio in Treviso by a friar from Lendinara – a village not far from Rovigo – on his way back from

filled her with pride, ably nurtured by the friar who repeatedly told her that ‘if I lived in the way and form that he was teaching me ... I would be equal to God in greatness, wisdom, happiness and in all divine perfection, so that when a man dies, there is no difference between God and the man.’⁶⁰ For his part, like many others the friar also tried to move closer to God through magic and sacrament abuse, in which he frequently asked the girl and numerous others to help him.

Margherita continued to believe in Lodovico’s teachings for eight years until her new confessor insisted that she report it to the Sant’Uffizio. She had repeated them for eight years to her family and smaller children that she spoke to, thereby creating a chain of communication which extended from the friar to an increasingly large number of individuals and whose effects seemed to spread like wildfire with wholly unpredictable results.

However, such cases of a long-term education in unbelief did not constitute the norm. The procedure that clerics normally used for spreading heterodox ideas and propositions was more elementary and episodic, less continuous and sometimes even involuntary. It was, however, carried out by an uncontrollable but certainly significant number of individuals who met in a wide variety of different contexts and ways to speak about matters of faith, pointing out contradictions, proposing alternatives and expressing dissenting positions. Furthermore, even though this field did not lack ‘a large and probably growing number of individuals who approached the work of spiritual and moral reform in earnest’,⁶¹ it is undeniable that the clergy’s role in the spread of heterodoxy was anything but a minor detail. This was also somehow irrespective of the will that effectively guided heterodox discourses; it was not always easy, for example, to distinguish between internal criticism of ecclesiastical malpractice and arrogant ostentation of wealth from libertine-influenced stances which openly condemned not only the worldly organization of the Church but also dogma and even the religion itself. It was not a simple matter to find a distinction or set a limit which could not be overstepped. Someone who certainly failed to do this was Fra’ Leonardo from Verona. In the Venetian monastery of the Friars Minor of San Giobbe during the 1630s and 1640s he conducted a heated critique of the life of friars and the clergy. He was heavily influenced by Protestant principles and often came close to an openly heretical position. While he defended the excesses of a priest’s appearance before his flock, stating that ‘the vestments in different colours that priests wear to say Mass are garments suited to fancy dress costumes’, he soon went around the monastery asserting that ‘these ecclesiastical

the Levant: ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 151, *Miscellanea processi* file, spontaneous appearance by Fra’ Giovanni on 27 April 1681, at the court in Treviso, sent to Venice for reasons of jurisdiction.

⁶⁰ Ibid., spontaneous appearance by Margherita on 5 September 1726.

⁶¹ Domenico Sella, *Italy in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Longman, 2000), p. 122.

matters are nothing more than terror', that 'the soul dies along with the body', and even made a blasphemous attack against the figure of the Madonna, who he felt was responsible for giving birth to 'many bastards'. He did not fail, however, to underline his beliefs through his behaviour: according to witnesses, Leonardo kept a prostitute, did not confess, did not celebrate Mass and ate meat on days when it was forbidden.⁶² This emphasis fully corresponded to the very public nature of the friar's theories, put forward before an audience equally made up of clerics and laymen on different occasions, such as walks around the monastery or religious festivals. They were signs of an internal critique which must have influenced the huge audience of believers perhaps even more than criticisms from more openly heterodox groups. Thanks to the presence of figures such as Leonardo, which was extensive judging by the documentation, broad sections of society had the opportunity to sample heterodoxy and find immediate validation and precise confirmation of a mood which had become widespread in the second half of the seventeenth century. While in Fra' Leonardo's case the beliefs in question were fairly evident and his journey towards open unbelief was well pronounced, there was an indefinitely modulated series of intermediate positions and opportunities for expressing and formulating dissent, whether these positions were dictated by the most disparate reasons for dissatisfaction or by careful consciousness raising. The risk in this respect was that the attack launched from wholly orthodox positions, perhaps motivated by extreme piety, found common ground with libertine-influenced accusations and grew as a result. Even though the latter originated from opposing premises, they reached conclusions which were dangerously similar.

Let us take the example of Abbot Claremont, who passed through Venice in 1696 on a journey from Vienna to Rome. He was extremely critical of the mores and traditions of the regular orders and expressed his dissent by using vocabulary that seemed to reiterate the anti-curial and libertine lexis well known to large sections of the population. When he met the Secretary of the Nunciature, Abbot Andrea Borghi, he expressed all his resentment against the Jesuits, or the 'Ignatians' as he called them, who had stopped the publication of one of his books in Vienna. He added that their 'being' consisted 'of vanity, appearance and politics'. He despised all these things, but unfortunately saw them reflected in the organization and teachings of the Church; pontiffs only dealt with political matters, while believers were held at bay by the network of saints that they were expected to worship and were slaves to images and the concept of purgatory. The same forms of worship of the regular orders were

⁶² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 103, Giustina Sugolota file, written denunciation against Fra' Leonardo read out on 27 June 1628. The file continued in 1648.

nothing more than ‘superstitions and trifles, invented by them to make money’. He felt that one – and perhaps the only – way out could be the primacy of the Council over the pontiff.⁶³

Claremont made no mystery of his ideas during frequent discussions with numerous priests in Bernardo Fedeli’s house, where he was staying. Bernardo’s wife, Angelica, was also present on these occasions, and although she professed a certain ignorance on the matter – ‘I’m ignorant and I don’t know what they were talking about’ – she was struck by the fact that the Abbot rejected papal authority and the intercession of the saints by declaring ‘that he only believed in what he saw’ and ‘that he only followed in Christ and the Apostles’ footsteps’.⁶⁴ One day he asked her directly if she believed in the pope and burst out laughing in the face of what he must have thought were unseemly professions of faith.⁶⁵ It is clearly impossible to establish whether Claremont really stated what Angelica accused him of, but it is at least probable that she understood the Abbot’s language independently of the context in which he used it; he filtered elements which made it familiar and took it into the field of forms of heterodoxy known to her. In this respect the authorities’ deep-rooted concern that ‘speaking about’ could turn into ‘speaking against’ was perfectly justified.

The people entrusted to speak about religion were naturally the clerics themselves. In Venice they consisted of a sizeable group of experts who were easily recognizable and accessible, a body of professional intermediaries between faith and human affairs. The number of monasteries in the city during the seventeenth century fluctuated between 30 and 39 for men⁶⁶ and between 32 and 36 for women. The number of parishes was unchanging at 72, including the cathedral: there were 55 collegiate churches, 11 non-collegiate churches, five attached to female monasteries and one to the Canons Regular of the Holy Sacrament. Chapters in collegiate parishes consisted of well over ten people including a parish priest, priests, deacons, subdeacons and acolytes. The figures

⁶³ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 125, Melchiorre Satellico file, trial against Abbot Claremont, written document presented by Abbot Andrea Borghi on 14 July 1689. On the worship of friars, see *ibid.*, deposition by Don Giuseppe Vincenti on 21 July 1689. On the use of the term ‘bagatelle’ (trifles), which belongs to ‘a precise philosophical-political tradition’ that brings together figures like Pomponazzi, Bodin and Bruno, see Sacerdoti, *Sacrificio e sovranità*, pp. 295ff.

⁶⁴ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 125, Melchiorre Satellico file, trial against Abbot Claremont, deposition by Angelica Fedeli on 19 July 1689.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, deposition by Angelica Fedeli on 11 August 1689.

⁶⁶ On the organization and culture of the regulars in Venice, an essential work is Barzani, *Gli affanni dell’erudizione*, which inserts a study of the network of communities in Venice within the social, cultural and political panorama of the city.

for non-collegiate parishes were not far below this.⁶⁷ Although it is difficult to establish figures as a result of the high level of mobility of the regular orders, a fairly reliable estimate gives us 4,756 clerics in 1642 and 5,710 in 1760, with a rate of increase more or less in keeping with the city's overall population. It is interesting to note how the number of priests and friars doubled between the second half of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century, while the number of nuns dropped by half.⁶⁸ Between approximately 1586 and 1760 the secular clergy increased in number five times over from one priest for every 277 souls to one for every 53.⁶⁹ This means that in the period in question there was a much higher number of potential cultural intermediaries available than before, and that with their mobility opportunities they could reach an ever-increasing number of individuals. While the resulting vehicles often expounded faith and piety, they also foregrounded heterodoxy and scandal.⁷⁰

After all, friars and nuns were simply assimilating thoughts and beliefs that were circulating widely in cloisters and cells and taking them outside. As the Patriarch Francesco Vendramin said in 1612, in Venetian monasteries and convents 'probi et docti viri etiam reperiuntur';⁷¹ the others, those excluded from that *etiam*, presumably did not shine with Christian qualities. It is not surprising either that many members of the regular orders ended up before the Inquisitor. If we make a simple surface observation of the life of clerics in Venice

⁶⁷ See Silvio Tramontin, 'La diocesi nelle relazioni dei patriarchi alla Santa Sede', in Bruno Bertoli (ed.), *La Chiesa di Venezia nel Seicento* (Venice: Edizioni Studium Cattolico Veneziano, 1992), pp. 55–90; the data given above is on pp. 59–60 and 67–8.

⁶⁸ The data is taken from Beltrami, *Storia della popolazione di Venezia*, pp. 78–9. With regard to the difficulty of establishing sound figures for nuns, see Giovanni Spinelli, 'I religiosi e le religiose', in Bertoli (ed.), *La Chiesa di Venezia nel Seicento*, pp. 190 and 206–7. The same difficulties are encountered for religious presence in general. The author concludes – but the criterion for the calculation is not stated – that between 1562 and 1691 'just under 30,000 priests, friars and nuns lived in Venice': *ibid.*, p. 198. It is obviously impossible to quantify all the clerics who did different jobs in the city – such as tutors – or who were just staying there.

⁶⁹ This was a far higher rate of increase than the Italian average in the same period. See Xenio Toscani, 'La dinamica delle ordinazioni sacerdotali', in Bertoli (ed.), *La Chiesa di Venezia nel Settecento*, pp. 159–86.

⁷⁰ The picture of the life of regulars in the second half of the seventeenth century is, however, quite blurred in cultural and institutional terms as the fabric of the community went through marked transformations: 'long-established male and female communities disappear, others of more recent origin strengthen their presence, while new foundations and regular families emerge on the scene. In this way a picture takes shape which is destined to last, broadly speaking, until the Napoleonic interventions': Barzazi, *Gli affanni dell'erudizione*, pp. 30–31.

⁷¹ Tramontin, 'La diocesi nelle relazioni dei patriarchi'. The quotation from Vendramin's *Relatio ad limina* of 1612 is on p. 67.

in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries without analysing anyone's state of mind, it comes across as troubled, swarming with individuals constantly moving between homes who usually cast off their habits at the first opportunity only to pick them up again as soon as they became useful once more; various episodes of violence, an 'underworld', scandals and libertine behaviour are documented with an unequivocally large number of sources. Precisely because there were so many of them, it was difficult to carry out an indepth investigation of the doctrinal aspect of attitudes which were first and foremost a disciplinary matter. In other words, as it was already hard enough to monitor their behaviour, it was a hopeless task to try to identify the beliefs that fuelled it except by employing supposition.

The strong presence of heretical or prohibited material which friars had access to in monastery libraries must have played an important role in the creation of such an extensive network of deviant behaviour and heterodox ideas and discourses. It was often impossible to run these libraries in specially assigned places and so they frequently spilled over into the friars' private quarters; while they were being accumulated over the two centuries in question, the books 'invaded the old rooms that had become too cramped and the friars' cells, freeing the practice of reading from the rigid controls of the previous age and multiplying the opportunities for individual access to the written word'.⁷² An increasing number of clerics therefore found themselves in the position of having easy access to works not always characterized by exemplary orthodoxy. In this respect the overview offered by the 1599 survey of monastic libraries also shows that Venice had what was defined as 'belated discipline', with the ongoing presence of heterodox texts inside monasteries. Despite the investigation, there was no apparent reversal of trends; in the second half of the seventeenth century a large number of libertine texts produced by the Incogniti could still be found

⁷² Antonella Barzazi, 'Ordini religiosi e biblioteche a Venezia tra Cinque e Seicento', *Annali dell'Istituto storico italo-germanico in Trento*, 21 (1995): 141–228. This article offers an overview of how much heterodoxy could be found in Venetian monastery libraries at the end of the sixteenth century. For the Italian context in general, see Romeo de Maio, *Riforme e miti nella Chiesa del Cinquecento* (Naples: Guida, 1973), in particular the essay 'I modelli culturali della Controriforma. Le biblioteche dei conventi italiani alla fine del Cinquecento', pp. 365–81; see also Marisa Borraccini and Roberto Rusconi (eds), *Libri, biblioteche e cultura degli Ordini Regolari nell'Italia moderna attraverso la documentazione della Congregazione dell'Indice* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 2006); Roberto Rusconi, 'I libri dei religiosi nell'Italia di fine '500', *Accademie e biblioteche d'Italia*, 72 (2004): pp. 19–40; Roberto Rusconi, 'Le biblioteche degli ordini religiosi in Italia alla fine del secolo XVI', *Rivista di storia del cristianesimo*, I (2004): 189–99; Giovanni Romeo, *Inquisitori, esorcisti e streghe nell'Italia della Controriforma* (Florence: Sansoni, 1990), pp. 98–101.

in the monastery of San Francesco della Vigna.⁷³ This was not surprising, given that in this particular case some friars from the monastery had taken part in the same Academy's meetings,⁷⁴ but more generally it highlights the way in which religious houses played a fundamental role in collecting and sorting books. Indeed, in 1781, after the suppression of the regular orders, Camaldolese friar Fortunato Mandelli wrote that 'trade in books and every other product disappeared in Venice after the dissolution of the regular orders: as far as books are concerned there is no longer anybody who has any rapport with Holland and France, and only a few people have some rapport with Spain and Portugal'.⁷⁵

In their reading, many clerics salvaged elements to use for developing their visions of the world, which did not necessarily coincide with either their condition or orthodoxy. Monasteries therefore resonated with the voices of those who tried to compose their own thoughts and then explained them, using their fellow brothers for initial feedback. Opinions and remarks were expressed 'walking around the monastery, speaking about light topics and love', as our old acquaintance Fra' Elia Borghi did in the Carmelite monastery of Sant'Angelo on Giudecca,⁷⁶ or by meeting specially like the Benedictine 'group of ... friars' from San Giorgio Maggiore, who shared opinions on the idea 'that fornication was not a mortal sin' in 1708.⁷⁷

These cases were often exercises in rhetoric or proposals of arguments used to introduce theological exchange between subjects who had a professional interest in the themes. However, controversies just as often stemmed from beliefs with different origins and the need to put them to the test. In the late 1650s, for example, Fra' Girolamo Flech must have been sufficiently convinced of his beliefs to put them forward somewhat insistently to his fellow brothers, the Dominicans of San Giovanni e Paolo. According to the latter, he went around saying that those who believed that images of saints and the Madonna could work miracles 'were mad, brainless and ignorant', continuing 'that this

⁷³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 110, trial against Fra' Cherubino from Venice and Fra' Giovan Battista from Este, deposition by Fra' Pietro Antonio from Arzignano on 29 May 1663, c. 6v.

⁷⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 103, Antonio Rocco file, anonymous letter read out on 27 February 1635.

⁷⁵ Letter from Mandelli to Francesco Maria Raffaelli of 7 April 1781, quoted in Antonella Barzazi, 'Dallo scambio al commercio del libro. Case religiose e mercato librario a Venezia nel Settecento', *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 156 (1997–98): 1–45, at pp. 43–4.

⁷⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, trial against Fra' Elia Borghi, deposition by Fra' Alberto Ceffis on 18 February 1687.

⁷⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 134, Giovanni Levre file, trial against Angelo Savioli and Antonia Toselli, spontaneous appearance by monks Felice Senacchi on 20 December 1708 and Paolo Antonio Grandoni on 5 May 1711.

worshipping of images was futile' and consequently praising 'the heretics, who do not worship them, because they must not be worshipped'. His set of theories naturally also included the mortality of the soul and he answered a brother who had asked him how he could prove it by saying 'that all the ancient philosophers were of this opinion, and that we are absolutely no different from other animals, who have the opportunity to talk like us, albeit imperfectly, and that we are also similar to animals when we die'. Indeed, did the Holy Scripture not say that 'caelo caeli domino, terram aut dedit filiis hominum'? What else could this mean, if not that 'the sky was for the Lord God, and the earth for we men' and that 'the rest of us were mortals in our souls too, and that God punished our sins in this world with illness and other afflictions, and so purgatory was not necessary'? There was also undeniable experimental proof which supported him and his theory: some time before, he had stood in front of a crucifix with Fra' Giovan Francesco Tempio from the same order, 'where they prayed to receive the grace that the first one of the two to die could come back to tell the other about the mortality or immortality of the soul, and whether purgatory existed'. Fra' Giovan Francesco then started the scouting mission, perhaps in spite of himself, 'but ... having been dead for a long time ... and not having appeared, he deduced that our soul was mortal, and that purgatory did not exist'.⁷⁸

Therefore, as there was no form of life after death, the benefits and miracles attributed to saints could only be accounted for by divine intervention; the soul of a saint was destined to die just like that of any other human being, 'but to those people who prayed to a saint, God ... conferred grace ... because he knew the good deeds carried out by the saint during his life'. This theological vision became part of the historical perspective in some way and it was no longer obligatory:

⁷⁸ This was a literary topos that might have derived from the commitment made by Giulio Cano in Seneca, *De tranquillitate animi*, XIV, 9 and which, variously modified, converged with the normal heterodox discourse. Purely by way of example, see the agreement between Caravia and Zanzolo, and the appearance of the latter, in Alessandro Caravia, cc. B IIv, Gv–GIIIr, or the pact between Mahmut and Egry Boinou in *Turkish Spy*: 'and let us make a covenant, that whosoever dies first shall soon appear to the survivor, and give him a true account of his state, if it be in the power of the dead to perform such bargains': *Letters Written by a Turkish Spy* (8 vols, London and Edinburgh, 1801), vol. 2, book 3, letter XXIX, p. 248. In 1574 Comodo Casanova, from Vicenza, was accused of having stated that the soul was mortal and that nobody had ever been seen returning from the other world to say whether the afterlife existed. It was all 'invented by friars and priests to live without working and to grow rich with Church property': ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 38, trial against Comodo Casanova, anonymous denunciation presented on 2 January 1574.

to believe that Jesus Christ came to the world to redeem us, and that he was a real God, because if you read the Gospels, you see discrepancy in them. Therefore in ancient times, when the Holy Fathers saw that the Church might founder, knowing and predicting that with time there would be men of wit who would write against the Gospels, they and in particular Saint Thomas wrote the *Catena aurea*, and Saint Augustine wrote the book *de Concordantiis Evangelistarum*.

This harsh critique naturally did not spare the organization of the Church at the time, in particular the pope, inspired by Alexander VII's much-vaunted Jubilee. He 'had reserved many cases for himself to have the opportunity to hold Jubilees, but that every priest had the power to absolve from any sin, and to this effect there was a holy year every twenty-five years, to make the people go to Rome to part with money'. It was perfectly consistent to claim that 'in the elections of supreme pontiffs ... the Holy Ghost did not participate, because there was discord among the cardinals', intent on seeking papal power which they did not want to share with anyone after gaining. In this way they betrayed the implicit teaching of Peter, who:

took Paul as his helper in the pontificate, therefore even now there should be a vice-pope as helper, and if they do not want it, it is because the pope does not allow it, because his authority would diminish ... and two would be better because one alone cannot rule the world.⁷⁹

Flech did not only share similar thoughts with his fellow brothers and lay brothers; some other laymen also benefited from them. The usual place for discussing them, however, was the refectory table,⁸⁰ and some friars must have been fascinated by his strong arguments and the theories he expounded. A brother identified only as Fra' Camillo was even inspired to renounce the faith and flee to Amsterdam to learn about Girolamo's teachings in greater depth.⁸¹

It is impossible to assess the impact of conversations of this type outside the cloistered environment, even if some diffusion among laymen can be conjectured. The clergy basically presented itself as the institutional mediator of the heritage of religious knowledge – in whatever form this took – available to society, and indeed significant aspects of the daily extent of religious dissent and its popularity can be seen frequently in the activities of friars. This was aside from any question of the involuntary propagation of heterodoxy, sometimes linked to

⁷⁹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 108, trial against Fra' Girolamo Flech, deposition by Fra' Urbano Urbani on 5 June 1657.

⁸⁰ Ibid., deposition by Fra' Paolo from Venice on 12 June 1657.

⁸¹ Ibid., deposition by Fra' Raimondo Redois on 29 June 1657.

the forms of controversies or the procedures of the Sant'Uffizio; paradoxically, when the Inquisitor asked questions, the propositions deemed to be wrong or heretical were repeated, regardless of whether he was interrogating a witnesses or a defendant. In this way one could learn about heterodox doctrines or ideas while being interrogated by a religious court whose task was to make sure that they were eradicated. Another influential factor was the effect of having poorly trained clerics. A 1680 denunciation by Fra' Leonido Corbatti from the monastery of San Francesco di Paola, addressed to the Doge and the Inquisitor, stressed how Fra' Baldassarre Stricher, 'who has been ruling the Minim friars in the Province of Venice with barbarous tyranny for twenty years', had 'given a habit to more than two hundred young men, most of whom were boors and workers at the Arsenal in Venice, so ignorant that they couldn't even read yet, they utter more heresies than other words during Mass'.⁸²

However, regardless of whether the elements of unbelief were insinuated or openly suggested by clerics, friars, monks or priests, the act of voluntary conversion to heterodoxy was more worrying. Let us examine the case of 27-year-old widow Elisabetta Baglia. During Lent in 1693 she received frequent visits from Abbot Schenza, who told her that a certain Gatton from Verona publicly declared that neither God nor the soul existed and that 'our souls only consist of the movement and beating of the heart, they transmigrate from one body to another. That the souls of those who do bad transmigrate into the bodies of animals. And that the world was created naturally, and other similar things'. His words did not fail to have an effect on Elisabetta:

and although with regard to the other points I resisted the temptation and doubts that came to me after hearing what was said above, I believed in the transmigration of souls, having believed that after death our souls are really separated from our bodies and go to purgatory, hell or heaven depending on our good or bad deeds.⁸³

Don Ippolito Basilio, a priest who officiated in the parish of San Giovanni di Rialto at more or less the same time, was denounced by one of his parishioners, Eleonora de Angelis, in 1698. The two had developed a certain routine, whereby the priest used to visit the woman and her three daughters at home. On one of these occasions she voiced her daughters' concerns by expressing the fear that there was a devil in the *sottoportico* of their house, because they often thought they could see people's shadows. Don Ippolito hastened to reassure her that it

⁸² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 121, Bartolomeo Griffi file, trial against Fra' Pacifico Camisano, letter dated 6 July, read by the Inquisitor in the session on 20 July 1680.

⁸³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 124, Futino don Erasmo file, trial against Abbot Schenza, spontaneous appearance by Elisabetta Baglia on 10 September 1693.

could not be the devil as he simply did not exist. Two of the daughters, Zanetta and Meneghina, disagreed with him on the basis of two considerations: during a sermon in the church of San Silvestro they had heard the opposite stated, with ‘things of great terror’, and Meneghina had heard her sister read the ‘book of the seven trumpets’ – clearly Revelation – and they had convinced themselves that the devil existed. Faced with this unexpected resistance, Ippolito moved on to other matters: he reiterated that hell did not exist and although he admitted that it was possible to be saved or damned, damnation consisted of being confined in places other than hell. With regard to the ‘book of the seven trumpets’ that had made such an impression on the de Angelis sisters, and probably on the whole family, he countered using a consideration taken directly from the theory of the imposture of religion. Books like that ‘describe such things to cause fear, not because they are true, just as preachers said things about hell and the devil to frighten the people, while they are really more jokes than real things.’⁸⁴ He was therefore suggesting that people should only believe part of what preachers said, because ‘for every three things they say ... one of them is true and the others are said to make people afraid.’⁸⁵

From the pulpit

The previous chapters have shown that there were no lack of public opportunities for making speeches and preaching to small crowds who gathered around improvised stands or in private houses. However, this form of preaching came from outside, put forward as heterodox in nature and bearing the signs of a general tendency towards rebellion. Alternatively, as in the case of preaching in the Ghetto, it was destined for another audience, but could potentially have an alienating and dangerous effect on a Catholic audience. The risks in these cases were easy to identify, but the Sant’Uffizio soon realized that the Church itself was capable of producing a major vehicle for heterodox unrest in the shape of sermons given by clerics or preachers. These were obviously intended to explain matters of faith, but were conducted in such a way as to have the opposite

⁸⁴ Don Ippolito must have had a certain propensity for interpreting the characteristics of the afterlife freely, as he made the following proposal to a Frenchwoman who lived in the same house after taking her hand: ‘without any scruple, Madam, I would like us both to be completely naked and go to heaven’: ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 129, trial against Don Ippolito Basilio, spontaneous appearance by Eleonora de Angelis on 2 December and by Zanetta de Angelis on 9 December 1698.

⁸⁵ Ibid., deposition by Meneghina de Angelis on 23 December 1698.

effect, disseminating elements of doubt and supplying anti-Catholic if not anti-religious arguments.

Messages were easily passed on. A priest from Campolongo, for example, had already established such a close relationship with his flock that although he uttered 'improper words', everybody still hung on them, 'and even if he said *stoppa, stoppa, stoppa* – a word used to declare victory in a popular card game – people would appreciate it', as one of the priest's colleagues explained. However, instead of '*stoppa, stoppa, stoppa*', by putting forward the idea that it was not necessary to confess or take communion because Christ had died for everybody, the matter became a potentially serious one.⁸⁶ What must have been even more worrying was the previously mentioned fact that the parish priest of San Luca, a disciple of Antonio Rocco, claimed during his sermons that the world had not been created, that the soul was mortal and that God was not an efficient cause.⁸⁷ These cases were extreme because they were explicit. There were, however, many other less eye-catching but equally significant cases with regard to heterodox elements being put forward and gaining in popularity.

On the morning of 16 January 1661 Vincenzo Luca, a Dominican from Naples, preached in St Mark's Square. The content of his sermon must have caused a fair amount of upheaval, as at least three people rushed to tell the Inquisitor how the Neapolitan had used it as a pretext for reciting a highly caustic satirical speech against marriage.⁸⁸ He repeated the sermon that same evening, but on this occasion he was observed by the Commissioner of the Sant'Uffizio, who had been alerted by the Inquisitor. With the diligence befitting the execution of his duties, the Commissioner then appeared in court on 19 January to present an account of what he had heard. It seems that Fra' Vincenzo had spoken about marriage in terms which were open to dangerous interpretations. First of all, he had established a daring anagram of 'uxor' as 'orcus et infernus', and used this as a basis to develop an argument which must have appealed to the habitually salacious people. He had said that 'it is a miracle or a marvel that husband and wife live in peace and, after death, are buried together', and indeed Abraham had had two tombs built in order not to lie next to a wife that he did not love, given that he welcomed her death as a form of liberation. Job, too, had fared no better with a wife who 'nagged more than the devil'. Fra' Vincenzo then:

⁸⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 107, trial against Carlo Filiotti, deposition by Don Domenico Damiani on 17 December 1652, c. 15r.

⁸⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 103, Antonio Rocco file, anonymous letter dated 20 July 1652.

⁸⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 110, trial against Fra' Vincenzo Luca, internal note of the Sant'Uffizio on 16 January 1661.

told about a man who took his wife on his shoulders as if she were the heaviest cross that he could carry, and about another who was on a ship and had to lighten the load to escape from a tempest; while his companions threw away things and goods that they found, he flung out his wife, saying that she was the biggest weight that he possessed.

Therefore, because of the torment to which he was subjected, a husband acquired greater merit than any martyr, 'as it [marriage] is the biggest martyrdom which can be borne'. He told a story to back this up: a devil called Sigismondo:

with God's permission ... he assumed human form, and when he took a woman as his companion, she gave him so much torment and trouble that he regretted having become a man, and preferred to stay in hell than see and stay with that woman. After he returned to hell, and with God's permission entered the body of the King of England's daughter, they [the exorcists] had the idea of saying that they had sent for his old wife in Florence. On hearing this, he said that he didn't want to see her, and he would rather leave the girl's body, which he did.⁸⁹

According to the Commissioner, everything was compounded by the fact that these words were pronounced 'in those highly respectable places, especially where people from many different nations gather together besides Catholics'.⁹⁰ The captive audience certainly seemed to have been enjoying themselves. More attention was paid, however, to the episodes narrated by the friar than the setting in which he did so. For example, Stefano Bindoni could not tell the Inquisitor the context in which they were told or the meaning of the sermon, but recalled the story of the sailor who threw his wife into the water and another one, which the Commissioner did not remember, about a giant who selected a little wife when the time came to marry, 'saying that as he had to have evil, he wanted to choose the lesser one'. 'He also told the one about Messer Giacomo and Messer Sigismondo, which I can't tell very well'. With regard to the possible heterodoxy in these propositions, he did not feel it was a problem that applied to him: 'I'm ignorant, and I think they're there to preach well.'⁹¹

It is clear how single elements of a discourse that was perhaps more complex might have been decontextualized and circulated autonomously. Indeed, people started to use them after the friar's first sermon. For example, Paolo Zuccato, a

⁸⁹ Ibid.: the words are those of the same Fra' Vincenzo before the Inquisitor in a hearing on 27 January 1661. Although it tallies, the Commissioner's account is extremely confused.

⁹⁰ Ibid., account by Commissioner Fra' Raimondo Maria from Vicenza on 19 January 1661.

⁹¹ Ibid., deposition by Stefano Bindoni on 19 January 1661.

merchant, stopped to listen to the story of Sigismondo the devil while he was passing through the square during the second sermon as 'I had already heard the same story being told shortly before in my *bottega*'.⁹²

Fra' Vincenzo was called to justify himself a few days later, on 27 January, after his cell in the monastery of San Domenico had been searched. The 39-year-old Neapolitan said that his aim had simply been to demonstrate how 'a bad wife is an unbearable burden for her husband, and whoever tolerates her patiently can go to heaven in this way'. He did not feel that he had said anything out of place, given that he had compared the text of his sermon with the '*Concionum domenicarium*', and with regard to the tale of Sigismondo the devil, 'I told it to confirm that bad wives were as unbearable as the devil himself'.⁹³

The papers reporting the outcome of the trial are missing, but the defence probably did not obtain the desired effects as two years later in 1663 Fra' Vincenzo sent a letter from Ferrara, where he had become the master of novices, asking for permission to start preaching again. The Sant'Uffizio granted him his wish, but warned him to avoid telling tall stories in the future.⁹⁴

In the meantime, back in 1661 Fra' Alessio Mataluccio took an even more extreme stance in the pulpit by putting forward themes which were dangerously similar to those adopted by the libertines to prove the imposture of religion. The only reason that Fra' Alessio believed in the 'law' of Moses was because Christ had confirmed it. Indeed, he considered Moses to be a 'deceiver of Jews, because he did not present the sources from which he derived his Law', and his miracles were not as they seemed but trickery, seeing that 'the sea also drains away by itself, manna falls from the sky in many places, water comes out of mountains, and these things can be done through the magic art, and if Christ had not approved that law, as it was said above, he [Fra' Alessio] would have believed that he [Moses] had been a sorcerer, and that he had worked everything that the scripture says through the magic art'. In essence 'one could say that they were natural effects, or acts of magic, like those carried out by devils and sorcerers'. He also ventured a dangerous comparison by grouping Moses and Mohammed together, given that 'with the Jews Moses could say that he was like Mohammed

⁹² Ibid., deposition by Paolo Zuccato on 19 January 1661.

⁹³ Ibid., deposition by Fra' Vincenzo Luca on 27 January 1663. This was undoubtedly the well-known and widely available Agostino Paoletti, *Discursus praedicabiles, sive Viridarium sacrarum concionum in dominicas et festa, a dominica Adventus usque ad dominicam Quinquagesimae occurrentia*, published several times both in the original vernacular and in Latin in Venice, Verona and Cologne from the 1640s onwards. For a preliminary survey of the long tradition of satire against marriage, see Warren S. Smith, *Satiric Advice on Women and Marriage. From Plautus to Chaucer* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

⁹⁴ ASV, Sant'Uffizio, b. 110, trial against Fra' Vincenzo Luca, session on 30 April 1663.

among the Turks: just as Mohammed deceived the Turks by giving them a law without citing witnesses, Moses did the same thing with the Jews'.⁹⁵

Similar theories put forward from the pulpit must have guaranteed increasingly far-reaching distribution and confirmed certain ideas that echoed widespread heterodox doctrines. At the very least, such speeches could provide tools, keywords or stimuli. For example, it was a sermon that led Simone Petracchini, a lover of occult science who evoked the devil and admired his powers, to have even more doubts about the goodness of the saints. One of his workers – Petracchini was a *perler* – told him that he had heard a Dominican preacher, a certain Masaniello, say that after St Peter's mother had gone to hell and been released thanks to the intercession of her son, 'when leaving hell some souls attached themselves to her so that they could leave too and she refused them by saying that Saint Peter only wanted her, and so I [Simone] added: oh what a bugger, who lacks the charity to let others out'.⁹⁶ He had therefore been supplied with the theological confirmation of what he believed in, along with a good justification for continuing to blaspheme against the saints as was his habit.

Others sometimes harboured doubts and started to cultivate a degree of scepticism, perhaps after hearing a disagreement between two preachers. This could even happen at a distance and was especially effective if at least one of them took issue with an authority in the way that Duns Scotus did. This was the case in Chioggia in 1658, when the Dominican Fra' Federico Tadino was heard saying repeatedly during his sermon that the Madonna:

was like a closed book, as nobody knew or could penetrate what it contained. And producing some reasons collected from different fathers in favour of sanctification, he said that Saint Thomas had never dreamt or said that Mary had been conceived without the original sin, because as the book was closed, neither Scotus nor the others could investigate. Indeed, Scotus must have died in desperation, because the most appropriate profession for some is planting cabbages rather than talking about the conception of the Virgin ... How could they know, Scotus and his other followers, if she had been conceived immaculately? They always wanted to suggest that Mary had been conceived in the original sin and then sanctified.

It is not clear from Fra' Tadino's speech whether he meant that Duns Scotus or some of his fellow preachers should dedicate themselves to horticulture. It was certain, however, that his opinions differed from those of Fra' Giovan Maria

⁹⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 110, Fra' Fontanarosa file, trial against Fra' Fontanarosa, written document by Fra' Giuseppe Pugliese dated 20 April 1661.

⁹⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 116, trial against Simone Petracchini, Camilla Borghi and Marietta Marchiora, cc. 62v–63r, declaration by Simone on 16 June 1671.

Pietra, a Minor Observant, who hastened to the Sant'Uffizio to denounce him. Indeed, as he continued his sermon, Fra' Giovan Maria felt he was being referred to when he argued that some preachers:

would be better off with a rope around their neck rather than around their waist as is their habit. He added that while there are people who like garlic and onions (referring to my sermons), there are others who savour delicate food, like eulogies and conversation at a higher level than the norm. He continued his abuse by furiously describing my physiognomy as that of an ignorant fool, with owl-like eyes, and a thousand other highly scandalous cases of impertinence, as a result of which the people were amazed and went away more confused than contrite.⁹⁷

In addition to the conclusions the public could draw about a fairly complex problem like the Immaculate Conception that was far from being solved, it remains to be seen how much these disputes contributed to strengthening the convictions of believers or managed to disseminate grounds for doubt and autonomous reflection.⁹⁸ In 1674 Fra' Teodoro Stricher simply concluded 'that

⁹⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 109, trial against Fra' Federico Tadino, spontaneous appearance by Fra' Giovan Maria Pietra on 18 November 1658.

⁹⁸ Franciscans and Dominicans had been disputing the matter since at least the fourteenth century. It was the Franciscan Duns Scotus – reprimanded in Tadini's polemic – who provided a theological basis for the doctrine which claimed that the Virgin Mary had been immune to the original sin since conception, a theory contested by the Dominicans. In the mid-seventeenth century the debate – which became heated on a cyclical basis – re-emerged above all in Spain and then in Italy. To put an end to the dispute, in 1661 Alexander VII issued the bull *Sollicitudo omnium Ecclesiarum*, which established the precise meaning of the term *conceptio* and prohibited any debate on the matter. This ban cannot have been a resounding success as the same pope explained to Giacomo Querini, the Venetian ambassador, in 1665 that 'out of sheer spite and pique there was discord between them, so much so that if the Franciscans said that the Virgin was impure, the Dominicans would claim the opposite, that she was pure and immaculate': ASV, *Senato, Dispacci Roma*, f. 161, 6 June 1665, c. 308r. For a primer on the matter, see Edward O'Connor, 'Immaculate Conception', in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, second edition, B. Marthaler (ed.) (15 vols, Detroit: Gale, 2003), vol. 7, pp. 331–4; 'L'Immaculée Conception', in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, vol. 2, pp. 2194–2212 and, above all, Adriano Prosperi, 'Immacolata Concezione', in *DSI*, vol. 2, pp. 770–772 and 'L'Immacolata a Siviglia e la fondazione sacra della monarchia spagnola', in Ida Fazio and Daniela Lombardi, *Generazioni. Legami di parentela tra passato e presente* (Rome: Viella, 2006), pp. 125–62. Also interesting is Tommaso Campanella, *Apologia dell'immacolata concezione*, A. Langella (trans. and ed.) (Palermo: L'Epos, 2004), in particular the introduction by Luigi Firpo.

the preachers say ... a lot of balls',⁹⁹ but this was not always the case and the Inquisitors were aware of this. In the same period Fra' Elia Borghi preached in the Cathedral of Reggio Emilia, claiming that many authors, above all Augustine, felt that alms and prayers for the dead 'can also be good for the damned'. When informed of the matter, the Inquisitor from Reggio made Fra' Elia return to the pulpit to retract his statement.¹⁰⁰

The problem was to provide believers with an image of the Church that was as united as possible, unaffected by internal conflicts and directed at interpreting the texts of the faith unambiguously. This was particularly pertinent in view of a situation in which it was not rare for a sermon to be used as an instrument of attack, whether doctrinal or personal, against lay institutions or other clerics.¹⁰¹ Awareness of the inherent dangers in the 'scandal' that such episodes could provoke made both the Church and lay authorities mistrustful. As a result, they tried to limit the coverage of the disputes, which sometimes even benefited from

⁹⁹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 117, trial against Teodoro Stricher, spontaneous appearance by Francesco Priuli on 10 April 1674.

¹⁰⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, trial against Fra' Elia Borghi, declaration on 4 December 1687.

¹⁰¹ Indeed, the pulpit gave the opportunity to reach a large audience and put forward views which were as much political as religious. On 12 March 1584, for example, while preaching in San Francesco della Vigna, Fra' Teodoro from Bologna launched a fairly direct attack on the administration of justice in Venice, saying that Easter was drawing near and that therefore 'many kids, doves and grey partridges will be brought to this city and given to the judges in order to obtain favours from them, and that when this is not enough, they will have dinners, where women and young men take part and lead the judges down the garden path and make them sign the petitions, and issue sentences as they want, and that when even this is not enough, they will get their hands on gold and obtain what they want with a hundred, two hundred or three hundred *scudi*'. The result was a minor diplomatic case: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Deliberazioni Roma*, reg. 3, 16 March 1584, c. 2r. Instead, Don Matteo Milanese turned on his colleagues while celebrating Mass on 30 August 1679 in Cadoneghe (near Padua) before parishioners from the surrounding area. When he came to his sermon, instead of engaging his flock in holy meditation, he felt it was better 'to put together an ignominious foul satirical speech against some of these parish priests, accusing them slanderously of various sins, and charging up the people to harbour a grudge against them, which caused great uproar among the parish priests, priests and the people, with the evident danger of grotesque deadly goings-on'. He ended by lambasting the ineptitude of the Venetian government, which did not take measures to punish such scandalous priests: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 112, written denunciation dated 25 September 1679 which reached the Podestà of Padua and was sent to Venice. On 2 October the Dieci decided that it was a state matter and that they would continue by instructing the trial court.

distribution through print.¹⁰² Public discussions on the jurisdictional limits of different Church bodies were also frowned upon; while it is difficult to say exactly what impression was formed by the 100 or so people who gathered in the church of San Vidal to hear 12 parish priests discuss the matter of the independence of the clergy in the Republic from the Patriarch in spring 1689, it is certain that it did not go down well with the Patriarch and reasonable to suppose that the audience did not obtain an impression of widespread harmony within the clergy.¹⁰³ Equally, the peasants of Villanova – in the Treviso area near Motta di Livenza – must have drawn certain conclusions when they heard the parish priest say during Mass that ministers of religion deserved greater respect and veneration than the saints, angels and even the Virgin Mary, given that the latter had needed to use eight words ('Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum') to make the Word become flesh in her womb, while priests only needed a total of five ('hoc est enim corpus meum') to make it 'precipitate from heaven into the

¹⁰² The fact that there was potentially quite a large audience was enough to justify a few editorial risks even if it involved multiple forceful interventions: in 1675, for example, the printer Giacomo Zattoni managed to publish the *Relatione del duello litterario del padre Macedo* with the help of the author and despite the efforts made equally by the Venetian Inquisitor, the Rome Sant'Uffizio and the Grand Duke of Tuscany to stop it from being printed: ASV, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, b. 366, letter from the Inquisitor to Riformatori on 22 November 1675. See also *ibid.*, Tivani file.

¹⁰³ As the *Provveditori sopra Monasteri* reported, 'on the 11th day of this month ... a group of ten or twelve parish priests had an open-door meeting in the church of San Vidal, and about another hundred people took part. Chairs and a table had been prepared in the aforementioned church as happens in public discussions. The parish priest of that church had some printed booklets handed out containing four propositions, printed with the permission of the superiors [namely with a printing licence]. With regard to these propositions, the above-mentioned parish priest stated them and discussed them with recourse to the authorities and books, which nobody objected to. Only the parish priest of San Gimignano, seated at the table, said in a low voice that the word *Nisi* in the first proposition caused some difficulty. Then the meeting ended, and this was as much as we could observe'. The Senate reassured the Patriarch by saying that the government wished to continue to see him as the legitimate superior, so that prerogatives were maintained 'and due respect and esteem for the dignity of the patriarchy, of the giuspatronato of the Serenissima, and to this effect the eye of public vigilance will be watchful to lend him [the Patriarch] the due assistance': ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 8, 23 April and written document by the Consultori in Iure Giovanni Pietro Bortoletti, Fra' Giovanni Maria Bertolli and Fra' Celsco Viccioni of 21 April 1689. There are some interesting considerations on the limits of patriarchal authority in Amelot de la Houssaye, *Histoire du gouvernement de Venise*, pp. 248–9.

Host'. Their superiority was also evident because while the Madonna had only managed to do it once, any priest could do it as often as he liked.¹⁰⁴

However, the danger did not only come from preachers with a recognized professional standing. Others were also active and attracted huge numbers of people. At the end of June 1703 posters appeared around Venice inviting people to an 'exposition' on *Revelation* to be presented by a certain Vincenzo Candidi. On the evening of 28 June, 400–500 people gathered in the appointed meeting place at the School of San Teodoro. Many of these were priests and friars, including the most important preachers and the reader in philosophy at the Greek seminary. The vast heterogeneous audience also consisted of 'heretics, Lutherans and Calvinists, humble people and lots of Jews'.¹⁰⁵ At the scheduled

¹⁰⁴ The priest – Alfonso Bragadin – felt that this clarification was necessary because a nobleman, Leonardo Giustinian, had arrived at Mass on the day of the Virgin of the Snow a bit late in his opinion and near the end of the ceremony according to the priest. Giustinian was angered by the decision not to wait for him. An altercation broke out with reciprocal threats and on the following Sunday the cleric felt it would be a good idea to refresh the believers' memories regarding hierarchies. For his part Giustinian analysed the sermon on the church parvis, saying that the dignity of the position was fine, but 'that the father had omitted that in the city burnt by fire sent by the Lord God, He killed seven hundred bad priests, and only saved the high priest Lot's wife, who then turned into a statue of salt for not having followed the angel's command. Because all priests at that time were married and did not make use of pretexts to keep prostitutes in their houses, passing them off as servants or relatives, as my [Giustinian's] house priest did, even though he was a curate. He died a sudden death a few days previously. And while those ancient priests were bad men, they were, however, much more learned and wise than these who exercise the cure of souls in villages: they may be praised, but they are ignorant and they don't know what they are saying, and if they lose their regular missal, people need to wait for six months without going to Mass until they have learnt to read the new missal'. According to the priest, who was asserting his origins – 'if he is one of the Giustinian family, I am a Bragadin [two families that belonged to the Venetian patriciate], and was born in a legitimate marriage. And my family is just as worthy as his' – Giustinian went on insulting him throughout the Mass, accusing him of being ignorant and inadequate for the task at hand: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 72, undated written document by Leonardo Giustinian read on 23 August 1645 and written document by Father Alfonso Bragadin of 8 August 1645. Three votes were needed before a decision was made to hold a trial on 1 September, of which I did not find any trace. Relations between the patriciate and the clergy were often tense: in 1733 Girolamo Contarini beat up – ably helped by a servant – Fra' Venanzio Maria Venanzi, of the Minims of St Francis of Paola, because he had not been permitted to hear the end of the sermon in the monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli on Murano: he had asked him to leave, ignoring who he was, 'as the sermon had started and reached a point that in all his prudence the preacher felt could not be heard by secular people': *ibid.*, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 139, 31 August 1733.

¹⁰⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 130, trial against Vincenzo Candidi, spontaneous appearances by Don Giuseppe Giuliani on 10 and 12 July 1703.

time Candidi, a 40-year-old whose accent suggested that he was from Romagna, appeared equipped with 'table and chair' and dressed as a priest. After placing the Scriptures on the table, he started the presentation 'by saying that everything he was going to say was an oracle from the Holy Ghost'. He was there to set right the repeated errors made by the Fathers of the Church, who had either said little on the matter or made mistakes.

This first meeting was used as a general introduction, in which he limited himself to arousing the curiosity of those present about the constant repetition of the number 7 in the Scriptures, especially in Revelation, of which he provided numerous examples.¹⁰⁶ He saved the rest for subsequent meetings and on Wednesday 1 July the audience was even bigger. Candidi reappeared and this time:

he focused his exposition on explaining the seventh millennium, in which men will be happy in the same way as Adam was before his sin, and deduced the existence of the seventh millennium from passages in Scripture, in Genesis, where it says that God only gave his blessing on the seventh day, and that the seventh day meant this purported millennium; he also claimed that this seventh millennium was a millennium of happiness, of a natural state, happy at the beginning, unhappy in the middle and successful and happy at the end, and proved this with three passages from Scripture, namely Nebuchadnezzar, Job and the prodigal son, in which there is a happy beginning, an unhappy middle and a successful happy ending. What's more, as proof of this purported millennium, he spoke by referring to the seven vials of Revelation, two of which were emptied in the sixth millennium, meaning that one would not need to be emptied in the seventh, thereby demonstrating the happiness of his seventh millennium.

These themes were partly taken from the Jewish tradition – in particular identifying the days of Genesis as periods of 1,000 years – and adapted to the subsequent Joachimite branch of apocalyptic literature. Candidi made abundant use of the prophetic books in the Scriptures such as Isaiah and Revelation, but did not restrict himself to these. In order to appeal to the mixed levels of the audience he was addressing, he needed to use more recognizable points of reference in common use. While he cited the canticle 'Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terram pax ...' to demonstrate how 'this peace ... was reserved by God to the seventh millennium', he also recalled that when the coming of the Kingdom of God was invoked in the *Pater noster*, 'this kingdom is the seventh millennium, which is regnum tuum, and questions dimitte nobis debita nostra, et libera nos

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., deposition by Don Giuseppe Leoni on 19 July 1703.

a malo, all meaning let this seventh millennium come soon'.¹⁰⁷ He interpreted the 'libera nos a malo' as liberation from present evil in view of the happiness of the seventh millennium.

In summary, Candidi's vision saw the world as destined to last for 7,000 years; 2,000 'in the law of nature, two in the written law and two in the law of grace'.¹⁰⁸ The seventh millennium of peace, 'plentiful in everything, without any toil' would be preceded by the sixth, which would feature the coming of the Antichrist. The seventh would instead be characterized by happiness, like Adam's world before sin existed. This happiness would not be limited to men, 'but also [to] vegetables and animals, bringing all things back to happiness, to a state of innocence'.¹⁰⁹ To explain things more clearly, he said it was like renting a house, a question 'that is of paying in advance, for someone who takes a house for seven years, whereby he does not pay during the last year as he paid a year in advance'.¹¹⁰ The reference was to the Jewish sabbatical year, 'in which no work was done, slaves were free, debts were forgiven, and it was a year of calm'.¹¹¹

In the third and fourth (final) lessons, held on the following Saturday and Sunday, he moved on to the salvation of the righteous and the end of the world using terms taken fairly literally from Revelation. These alone were more than enough to affect the audience. Overall, there was a contrasting set of reactions: 'many [clerics] were displeased by what he said ... and some other secular men listened to him and applauded'.¹¹² The fact remains though that his popularity was undoubtedly on the rise, as many people were forced to remain outside because of the crowds at the last two lessons.¹¹³

Candidi must have had an inkling that something was amiss and left the city in a hurry to return to Sabbioni, a village in the Vicenza area not far from Cologna Veneta. It was here where he had started explaining Revelation and, after seeing the results, had decided to try with a larger audience. He benefited from the protection and hospitality of the curate there, Giovan Battista Ricci from Fano, who wrote down his teachings and prophecies so that he could distribute them. One particularly well-circulated prognosis must have been 'a prophecy ... that in 1706 there will be famine, and in 1707 plague, and he claims to prove it with

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., spontaneous appearances by Don Giuseppe Giuliani on 10 and 12 July 1703.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., deposition by Don Stefano Stefanini on 9 August 1703.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., deposition by Don Giuseppe Leoni on 19 July 1703.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., spontaneous appearance by Don Giuseppe Giuliani on 12 July 1703.

¹¹¹ Ibid., deposition by Don Giuseppe Leoni on 19 July 1703.

¹¹² Ibid., deposition by Fra' Antonio from Venice on 31 July 1703.

¹¹³ Ibid., deposition by Don Gabriele Ghili on 14 August 1703.

the Holy Scripture, and various books by the prophets'.¹¹⁴ Candidi was also well known throughout the area as a result of this output. It was known that he was not a priest but a lay cleric. Stories circulated that he had gained the knowledge which led him to speak publicly about the end of the world as a Jesuit. He felt that he was 'the only one enlightened by the Holy Ghost ... destined for the true explanation of Revelation' and presented himself as such. This vein of thinking was supplemented by fierce criticism of the Roman Curia. In his opinion, popes and cardinals 'should be dragged along tied to the tail of a horse, after which the Church had to be moderated and reduced to perfection'.

From Sabbioni he travelled first to Padua and then perhaps to Pesaro. He also felt it appropriate to change his name to Antonio Olivieri. With this new identity and longer hair he returned to the Vicenza area confidently,¹¹⁵ but was met by the local Inquisitor, who had been forewarned by his Venetian colleague. Candidi's prophetic skills had not taken account of the fact that Andrea de Vescovi, the Chancellor of the Sant'Uffizio in Venice, spent his holidays in Cologne and Sabbioni.¹¹⁶ He therefore decided to make a rapid deviation towards Verona, and once there erase all traces of himself for good.¹¹⁷

The reasons for the success of the sermons are fairly easy to understand, as apocalyptic ideas were often found acting as autonomous underground stimuli.¹¹⁸ Sermons like those given by Candidi acted both as indexes of publicly

¹¹⁴ Ibid., deposition by Don Giacomo Maria Marieri, archpriest at the Collegiate of the parish church of Santa Maria di Cologne, on 3 December 1705.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., deposition by Don Giacomo Brugni on 10 December 1705.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., deposition by Andrea de Vescovi on 3 December 1705.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., letter from the Inquisitor of Verona to his Venetian colleague on 31 December 1705: 'regarding our theologian, I have had news from reliable sources that he was in Verona for a few days, and then left, it is not known where he went ... I am told that he is almost a saint, and that he stays in church for many hours of the day, and that the Lord inspired him to explain Revelation'.

¹¹⁸ The echoes of sixteenth-century prophetism are evident in these cases. On this topic, see Ottavia Niccoli, *Prophecy and People in Renaissance Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Richard L. Kagan, *Lucrecia's Dreams: Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Marion Leathers Kuntz, *The Anointment of Dionisio: Prophecy and Politics in Renaissance Italy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001). There is an ample bibliography on the social meaning of millenarianism and apocalyptic preaching. I used above all *Millenarianism and Messianism in Early Modern European Culture* (4 vols, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001); Jean-Raymond Fanlo and Andre Tournon (eds), *Formes du millenarisme en Europe à l'aube des temps modernes* (Paris: Champion, 2001); Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, revised and expanded edn (London: Maurice Temple Smith Ltd, 1970) and *Cosmos, Chaos and the World to Come* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Robert W. Scribner,

expressed ideas and occasions on which elements already present in daily conversation were amplified. This dynamism was guaranteed by people such as Don Camillo Giacomuzzi, a secular priest, who lived off alms in the period around 1713 even though this went against the prescriptions. While begging, he preached about evangelical poverty and a return to the example set by the Apostles, punctuating the frequent discussions he undertook with various people with apocalyptic elements. Camillo did not exactly start from the most neutral position and so stimulated debate easily: in his opinion the prophecy in Revelation had indeed come true and the Church, the 'harlot', had given ample proof that it was fallible, for example, through the sanctification of Pius V, described as 'a triumph ... of the devil'.¹¹⁹ He also showed those who spoke to him an unspecified document 'on which many things were written, and among other things that the soul was mortal'.¹²⁰ Giacomuzzi's words were probably the result of a self-constructed philosophy in mosaic form, strengthened by sometimes fierce exchanges with clerics from different backgrounds. Indeed, Don Camillo tried to frequent monasteries when he could, as it was easy to approach friars and clergymen and criticize them for being profoundly ignorant, making the boldness of his thinking stand out in contrast. He also tried to do this at the Jesuit monastery, but was unceremoniously chased away. In 1715 he was more successful in the cloister of the Girolamini monastery of San Sebastiano, where he had an interesting exchange of views with one of the fathers, Fra' Giovan Battista, a reader in theology, who approached Camillo after being informed by a fellow brother that he was a 'millenarian'. His conversation opener was a little brusque and straight to the point: 'are you a millenarian?'. The question must have caught Camillo somewhat unawares, as he immediately answered

For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); Christopher Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 321–62; Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages* (London: Hutchinson, 1999); Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist. Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). On the distribution of information regarding catastrophic events in general, see Paolo Rossi, 'Society, Culture and the Dissemination of Learning', in Stephen Pumfrey, Paolo Rossi and Maurice Slawinski (eds), *Science, Culture and Popular Belief in Renaissance Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 143–75. There is an interesting approach to Millenarism considered on a broad scale in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Du Tage au Gange au XVI^e siècle: une conjoncture millénariste a l'échelle eurasiatique', *Annales*, 1 (2001): 51–84.

¹¹⁹ This happened in 1712 and was the work of Clement XI.

¹²⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 136, trial against Don Camillo Giacomuzzi, spontaneous appearance by Pietro Curti on 6 July 1713.

‘in defence of the heresy of the millenarians’ and ‘that the devil was connected’. Giovan Battista obtained information about this millenarian heresy and found that it consisted of the following:

That is that after the resurrection of the dead, the kingdom of Christ had to last for a thousand years in this world, during which Christ himself together with the righteous and the blessed would enjoy every sort of bodily delight, even as far as carnal pleasures are concerned. After this period, the aforementioned kingdom would fall. Therefore I [Giovan Battista] started to object, stating that in order to substantiate their heresy, millenarians base themselves on repeating the thousand years found in Revelation, something which I refuted immediately by saying that those thousand years must be understood as eternity, and nothing else.

Camillo replied that the Antichrist had already come ‘and that his followers had hidden’. According to Giovan Battista, ‘this was exactly the feeling of sectarians, who claim that the popes are the antichrist, by which they do not mean a single individual, but all successors to the pontificate’. In any case the ‘millenarian’ felt he was in good company because ‘God made many doctors rise up through the Church, so that they could humiliate the same Church’. For the friar this was a gross mistake, given that ‘instead the Church had to be exalted as infallible in its dogma, and could not be humiliated’. Camillo maintained that in such matters tradition and orders from the authorities had to be abandoned: ‘one had to speak with the scripture at hand’. Unsurprisingly, this reasoning did not seem right to the friar who, let us not forget, was informing the Sant’Uffizio. It is, however, plausible that in similar circumstances he would try to set his orthodox beliefs off against Giacomuzzi’s damned ‘millenarian’ convictions. Therefore, he said that he had answered ‘that scripture was holy and that it was not up to the special spirit of any person to interpret the same scripture, that it was necessary to defer to the interpretation of doctors, accepted by the Church’.

His words were wasted, however, and he thought that Camillo was inclined to ‘interpret scripture according to his beliefs, and in the meantime he showed me some papers, and I read one of them, which contained as far as I can remember a passage from scripture, and which inferred: *ergo daemon est ligatus*’. Giovan Battista then had to reply that after the coming of Christ the devil was connected in the sense that ‘he no longer had the strength that he had at the time of the antichrist, and I added in Latin: *demon est ligatus, et tu ambulas?* wanting to infer that he was a demon, and a minister of the devil’.

While they were heading for the refectory, Camillo continued by saying that ‘the prophets were in the Church of God’, but Giovan Battista pointed out, thereby ruining his appetite:

that it was true, because prophecy is a sign of the true Church. And given that, with his way of speaking, that man showed signs that he wanted to be seen as a prophet, I said to him: do you perhaps attribute the role of prophet to yourself? On hearing this he flew into a rage against me, so much so that although he was invited to have something to eat, he didn't want to accept the invitation, and went off threateningly, telling me: videbis videbis ... testor Deum, quod ille pater (speaking about me) est ignorantissimus.¹²¹

Thinking in cloistered quarters

Cecilia Sacrati and the invisible men

Towards the end of August 1701, Sister Cecilia Sacrati, a nun from Ferrara at the Venetian Corpus Domini convent, asked to ease her conscience and was duly granted her wish. As was the custom, it was not the Inquisitor who took her deposition and conducted the questioning, but a cleric delegated by the Sant'Uffizio. In keeping with common practice, the choice fell on the usual confessor of nuns, Don Nicolò Ceresato.

The authorities had to deal with deviant episodes within convents fairly often and conduct investigations: demonic possession, feigned saintliness and sexual indiscipline were all the order of the day.¹²² Such news rarely leaked out though and heterodoxy came across as deep-rooted and consciously formed, carefully and tenaciously nurtured. This was the context in which 36-year-old Sister Cecilia entered the confessional on 1 September 1701 and started to tell her story. Don Ceresato duly heard something new and disturbing, which must have made quite an impression on him.

She said that since her childhood, 'always, from the moment in which I first had use of reason', she had denied the immortality of the soul, the presence of God in the Eucharist and the remission of sins. On many occasions after

¹²¹ Ibid., spontaneous appearance by Fra' Giovan Battista on 18 July 1715.

¹²² The condition of nuns and deviant episodes inside convents, topics on which I will not dwell, have produced an extremely extensive bibliography. I will restrict myself to mentioning Gabriella Zarri, *Recinti. Donne, clausura e matrimonio nella prima età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000) and Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns: A History of Convent Life, 1450–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and the bibliography contained therein. On Venice, see in particular Francesca Medioli, *L'Inferno monacale di Arcangela Tarabotti* (Turin: Rosenberg e Sellier, 1990) and Mary Laven, *Virgins of Venice: Enclosed Lives and Broken Vows in the Renaissance Convent* (London: Viking, 2002); Jutta Gisela Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

having entered the convent of San Maffio on Murano she had 'allowed people made invisible during the night by the work of the devil to enter the cloistered area, with whom I've been having impure relations for about twelve years'. To do this she had needed to carry out experiments in magic, thereby abusing the sacraments, in accordance with the teachings of a female friend, a woman who had conveniently died eight years before. She had given her soul to the devil, frequently ratifying the agreement, and to make 'my dishonest pleasures even more appreciable' she had 'coupled my pudendum with a sacred image, mostly of the crucifix, and then cursed the same image and the other saints'. She had also put two unconsecrated Hosts in the pix – given to her by the previously mentioned invisible people – made of poisoned material to kill the Mother Superior. She had coupled with the same people 'in all the vilest ways possible, one after the other'. She had used magic to seduce a recalcitrant cleric that she was in love with and had had sexual relations with him two or three times a day for three years. She had learnt the technique as a child; it consisted of dipping the Host in one's seed and then giving it to the subject of one's attentions. After conquering the object of her desire in this way, she had 'put him to the sword, with one of my companions helping me in the murder'. She was now asking to be forgiven for all this.¹²³

Ceresato must have thought that he was hearing what were at least partly fanciful ravings and that the nun had imagined what she was saying. Nevertheless, the acts which she claimed to have committed were, and still are, significant for the very fact that they were conceived in those terms. How did she manage to structure her hallucinations in this way?

Two months later, on 6 December, Ceresato summoned Cecilia again, presumably after receiving orders to do so from the Sant'Uffizio. His task was now to ascertain who her accomplices were. However, Cecilia's answers were characterized by denial and did not lead anywhere.¹²⁴ At this point things must have stalled for some time, but three years later on 6 August 1704 Ceresato sent for her once again. It is not possible to establish whether the renewed interest shown by the Sant'Uffizio was due to a request to this end from the priest, or part of a standard case review procedure. Some undated written instructions sent to him from the Court with a list of questions to ask might suggest that the latter hypothesis is correct.¹²⁵ In any case it is certain that the pair had stayed in

¹²³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 132, trial against Sister Cecilia Sacrati, deposition by Cecilia on 1 September 1701.

¹²⁴ Ibid., deposition by Cecilia on 6 December 1701.

¹²⁵ Ibid., undated written document. Among other things, he was asked to check whether the heterodox discourses had been only 'internal or whether she had expressed and uttered them by mouth'.

touch. After all, he was the confessor at the convent and the nuns there referred to him. His first question that day went straight to the heart of the matter: had she told self-made illusions or had those things really happened? Cecilia was in no doubt, stating 'they were not internal illusions, but true external actions, but she did not know what they really consisted of, apart from abuse of the Host, the work of the devil, to make the people with whom she coupled with impunity invisible'. She explained how they had been able to enter the convent and added some details about her meetings with the woman who had taught her magic.¹²⁶

Further months went by and then on 27 February 1705, after being summoned by Ceresato, Cecilia stressed that she had not only felt that she did not believe in God, but had also declared it openly both to herself and others. Her belief had also been nurtured by the support of an astrologer, whose name she could not remember, who was Lutheran or Calvinist and had acted as her spiritual guide. It was through him that she had met the woman and the invisible men.¹²⁷ Something was starting to emerge now; although Cecilia did not give any names, at least certain other people were seen to be behind her words. In any case the Sant'Uffizio must have decided that the moment had come to intervene more directly. On 13 July, when she arrived of her own accord at the usual place for confession, Cecilia found herself before a new confessor, Don Giovan Battista Panzetta – who had taken the place of Ceresato – accompanied by the Chancellor of the Sant'Uffizio.

She started her tale again almost from the beginning. Most of the events in question had taken place in the convent of San Maffio on Murano, where she had lived before moving to Corpus Domini in around 1699. She said that the astrologer had often come to the parlour to sell goods. They had become friends and she had confessed to him that she was in love with someone. He had then taken her to the parlour and introduced her to a woman who was around 60 years old, tall and deformed. She had said that she could give her what she desired, but that she needed a consecrated Host, which Cecilia had to remove from her mouth after communion. Things had gone as planned and meetings with the man, called Vincenzo, had started immediately in the *cavana* – a shelter for boats inside a building – of the convent and continued for about three years. In the same *cavana* she had renounced and cursed the Catholic faith in the presence of the woman and the astrologer, an essential condition for achieving and maintaining her carnal objectives. She had had to throw a crucifix

¹²⁶ Ibid., deposition on 6 August 1704.

¹²⁷ Ibid., deposition on 27 February 1705.

to the ground, cursing it and breaking it with hammer blows, 'and this outward profession was accompanied by inner belief'.¹²⁸

Following these events the woman had introduced her to another astrologer, who she then started to meet in the parlour, vegetable garden or in the famous *cavana*. He approved of his colleague's teachings unconditionally, to which he added part of the common libertine repertoire: confession was a means of control by priests and was therefore unnecessary. Sexual acts were recommended and were certainly not sins. In any case Cecilia cannot have been too concerned about whether they were or not as 'I did all possible carnal acts with the intention of scorning God, and of having intercourse with God'. The astrologer had also helped her to have an abortion and, perhaps, to kill Vincenzo. For her part, the nun had undertaken a proselytism campaign, teaching a dozen or so convent pupils and two or three nuns that it was not a sin to have sexual relations, and that her confessors had told her this. By the time she left the convent she had convinced them.¹²⁹

In a turnaround from normal practice, it was Cecilia who realized that it was late and asked to be heard again. The confessor and Chancellor duly came back on 27 July, but she had not lost her loquaciousness in the meantime. For the entire period leading up to her deposition to Ceresato in September 1701, she had followed 'different sects with pertinacity, namely Calvinism, Lutheranism, atheism, and furthermore I then believed some dogma'. All this had been 'instigated by the astrologer, from whom I received some books, one of which I remember was by Calvin, delighting in this reading against the Catholic religion'. She had thus become a vehicle for transmitting heterodox ideas:

I tried to imprint these heretical maxims on as many people as I could, speaking without regard in public and private, spreading them tenaciously among confessors and others, and when I was sometimes persuaded by these confessors, I went to the astrologer, who presented me with new topics, to which I surrendered myself easily, and to which I referred as much as possible in discussions to defend the above-mentioned false dogma.¹³⁰

The atmosphere of open rebellion that formed a backdrop to these beliefs is fairly clear. It was a concentrated form of what was happening at the same time outside the walls of the convent; within those walls words resonated with greater intensity and became deafening cries. Different elements combined to

¹²⁸ Ibid., deposition on 13 July 1705, cc. 1r–2r.

¹²⁹ Ibid., cc. 2r–3r.

¹³⁰ Ibid., deposition on 27 July 1705, cc. 3r–4v.

make the lesser of two evils in Cecilia's mind. The important thing was not so much coherence as the objective to rebel by denigrating and rejecting the official religion. In this way the things that Christians deemed to be sins were no such thing, but rather 'opinions of fanciful people'. At the same time, however, she rejected the sacraments because they were administered by priests who were men and therefore sinners. One could believe in whatever provided most satisfaction, but given that she felt that the Catholic religion was 'contrary to sense', she would have preferred to have been born into another faith because this one constrained her. In her scheme of things, God sometimes did not exist at all, while at other times He was partial and unjust.

Like many others she used experimental methods to put Him to the test, arranging special Masses and saying prayers. Whenever there was a rumour of a miraculous image, which must have happened quite often, she tried it for herself immediately. When it failed to work she said that if God wanted to save her, he would be obliged to work a miracle on the spot. God's evident insensitivity led her to turn to the devil and invoke him by attributing him with divine talents. She did whatever 'the devil, or my malice, suggested to me'.¹³¹ Cecilia's story continued in this vein, moving between these twin poles of the devil and her conscience, and was followed and in some way guided by the priest's questions. The ambiguity created as a result was clear. On the one hand there were the nun's heterodox propositions, clearly recognizable and belonging to bodies of widespread doctrines that could be traced to teachings which there was no reason to doubt. Her propaganda work also provided sufficient reasons to consider it as something more than a flight of fancy. On the other hand, however, there was her world of ghosts and invisible beings, which could also be identified and inserted into a notorious world of apparitions and techniques used by the devil, but which needed to be verified. When Ceresato had first wanted to understand if the nun's story was invented or not, he asked whether the woman who acted as her procuress was 'red in terms of her hair and eyes', that is to say two of the characteristic qualities of demonic beings, but Cecilia had not risen to the bait.¹³² The question had to be posed again when new details about her intercourse with the 'invisible men' emerged.

There were five of them in total: the astrologer and another two who had worked with him for 12 years plus two more, who had been introduced to her more recently. The astrologer was responsible for recruitment, 'and they committed these dishonest acts with me and each other, in my presence, in all the most beastly ways and means'. Two of them were clerics, including one

¹³¹ Ibid., c. 4v.

¹³² Ibid., deposition on 27 February 1705.

Franciscan, but they came wearing secular clothing. Cecilia could not say if 'these people were really those ones, or things conjured up by the devil, as many told me they might be'. She knew, however, 'that she had always thought they were the same people, and I still think so now, because they appeared with the same features, words, voice and other things'.¹³³

The story was interrupted again because of the late hour, but when it resumed on 5 August new details emerged to clarify the picture. When the 'invisible men' had come to the cell, there had always been two lit candles, one red and one black, which never burnt down and never went out until they left. She had contracted marriage with one of these, Don Antonio Sacrati, assisted by another two including a certain Ventura, a musician. They had undressed during the night and she had put on a ring bearing unknown characters. She had then been given another ring with a small diamond and a long string of pearls. They had sworn fidelity to each other 'and everything done by spouses followed'. She had given the diamond ring to Ceresato years before, so that he could sell it and have Masses said. She no longer had certain other gifts – a very fine gold reliquary and a stone set in silver – but did not explain why.

Their mutual fidelity must have been short-lived, however, as Sacrati later gave Cecilia 'a little box with a live baby boy inside, had by the same cleric from intercourse with a certain woman, who became a friend of mine through him'. The latter often stayed in the nun's cell, even for several days at a time. Cecilia had accepted to keep the baby in order to 'satisfy my shameless desires', but when he grew, 'and fearing that he would be discovered as he was about two years old, I suffocated him, although I knew from the same woman that he had not been baptized'.¹³⁴ The murder of the baby was followed by other criminal episodes, with murder attempts which were only partly successful. In her deposition on 25 August Cecilia also recalled that for all those years she had coupled 'impurely with lascivious intentions with various figures of saints made of wood ... in order to please myself with the same saints when meeting them again in heaven'. She recalled how she had given her soul to the devil by signing a note and how she had then repented and tried to get it back. She had decided to escape on the first Sunday of advent in 1700, and with the assistance of Sister Gioconda Basadonna she had taken refuge in the lower church to wait for the right moment. However,

¹³³ Ibid., deposition on 27 July 1705, cc. 5r–v. Similar sexual urges channelled by the nuns into fantasy by coupling with invisible beings, demons or figures from religious history were not uncommon. See, for example, the extraordinary account of professed nun Mansueta from the convent of Santa Croce, on 30 January 1574: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 38, trial against Sister Mansueta, cc. 3rff.

¹³⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 132, trial against Sister Cecilia Sacrati, deposition by Cecilia on 1 September 1701, deposition on 5 August 1705, cc. 6r–7v.

a storm had broken out, followed by 'that great flood all over Venice, which damaged almost all the wells'.

She had therefore turned to her confessor. He had summoned an exorcist in whose presence Cecilia had fainted, but in a certain way she had been freed. Now, at the end of the interrogation, she could also confess that there were really seven 'invisible men'; the two that she not previously mentioned were her confessors, Don Ippolito Grasseri and Don Nicolò Ceresato.¹³⁵

This final revelation must have somehow signalled a limit beyond which the priest realized he could not go. The mention of Ceresato, who had been the first to hear the nun's story and had perhaps persuaded her to testify, must have led him to believe that Cecilia's account was an inextricable tangle of reality, desires and fantasies. In this sense the case, at least in its outcome, was not very different from many other episodes of monastic possession. It was very different in terms of content, but this was not a matter that the Inquisition was concerned with too closely. There had been a systematic overturning of morality with a strong voluntary component; the nun had never felt or presented herself as possessed. Apart from the brief mention of an exorcist, the idea of possession was completely absent from Cecilia's mental outlook. What appeared instead was an attempt to build a kind of ideological armour for her rebellion in order to be able to justify it. It is perfectly understandable that this armour also included dreamlike elements. Cecilia created ways for her rebellion by finding both real and imaginary contacts, who sometimes even overlapped with one another.

On 1 October she was asked some questions again, but did not reveal much new information. She only remembered to add the name of Don Giovanni Giminiani to the list of 'invisible men'. She also specified the exact time period of their visits – from 1687 to 1699 – but did not add anything more. In any case there was already more than enough. She was made to abjure immediately.¹³⁶ On 25 February 1706 she received a new visit from Don Panzetta, who had clearly received relevant instructions from the court. At that point, however, she had nothing more to say. Strangely enough, she was made to abjure for a second time.¹³⁷

Monastic sociability

The episode of Cecilia Sacrati might have been extreme, although it was only one of many, but was the product of an underlying restlessness that characterized life in Venetian female monasteries. However, there are not many direct

¹³⁵ Ibid., deposition on 25 August 1705, cc. 8r–10r.

¹³⁶ Ibid., deposition and abjuration on 1 October 1705.

¹³⁷ Ibid., deposition and abjuration on 25 February 1706.

confirmations of real occurrences of unbelief inside cloistered areas apart from a few trial records, some information from observers and reports sent to the *Provveditori sopra Monasteri*. These were mainly disciplinary matters, but they seem to suggest adherence to doctrines which were not exactly orthodox to a greater or lesser degree. Each case of sexual relations between nuns or with outsiders, a completely normal practice, could assume the characteristics of a physiological reaction to the 'monastic hell' or present itself as the expression of deeper-set beliefs.

However, even ignoring the doctrinal implications of some instances of behaviour, the disciplinary problem alone gave rise to fears, not least because the situation was a difficult one to tackle. Let us take this conversation between the Patriarch, Francesco Morosini, and the Doge, Francesco Erizzo, on 4 July 1645 as an example. The Patriarch was reporting to the Collegio about changes in confessors in female monasteries (a problem that had already provoked major clashes in the sixteenth century). At a certain point the Doge proclaimed: 'there are as many convents in Venice as glass *botteghe* on Murano'. The Patriarch specified: 'there are thirty ... with those of all the districts'. The Doge made a rapid calculation – there must have been at least 2,500 nuns:

and, among these, one thousand five hundred are Venetian nobles. We have never had problems in dealing with women, but we have generally observed that it is extremely difficult to keep one of them under control. Now, not even all the angels in heaven would be enough to govern all of them: they are like glass, as those who want to conserve them must not place them among stones, but in cotton wool. Whoever wanted to clean all the glass in Murano in a single go would break a large amount of it. It needs to be done a little at a time, and if one remedy cannot be found for all, it is enough to find one for where it is needed most.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ ASV, *Collegio, Esposizioni Roma*, reg. 37, c. 18r [28], conversation on 4 July 1645. There were also difficulties of a physical nature encountered when attempts were made to restrict, for example, freedom of access to parlours. On 28 January 1681 Maurizio Rigotti, Captain of the Dieci and delegate of the *Provveditori*, went to the convent of San Lorenzo to carry out orders received from the same *Provveditori*. Arriving at the convent at midday he called the abbess, who answered from a distance. Rigotti repeatedly and insistently asked for the key to the parlours, but she did not want to give it to anybody, 'instead all the nuns in the monastery started shouting and insulting us, and they threw a large number of pieces of wood down from the balcony at us. On seeing this, I sent for the locksmith to come with chains and locks to put on the parlour doors, but he told me that he did not have any ready, and that he would prepare them if he received an order': ASV, *Provveditori sopra Monasteri*, b. 275, written document of 28 January 1681.

The disciplinary problems were partly linked to the continual comings and goings of individuals who managed to enter – or force their way into – the cloister without encountering any real difficulties and have daily conversations with the nuns. There is much literature about how easy it was to gain access to convents,¹³⁹ and in this sense they were at the centre of a dense exchange network of information and ideas. The fact that they were visited indistinctly by Venetian noblemen and foreign travellers was a source of some concern for the Venetian authorities, who directed the efforts of the *Provveditori sopra Monasteri* to fight the problem from the mid-seventeenth century onwards. Indeed, if they were relatives or benefited from other ties, noblemen could feed political information confidentially to the nuns, who could then refer it to foreigners. One of the first things a good ambassador did after arriving in Venice was to set up a monastic clientele base at a few strategic convents (such as Sant'Alvise, San Zaccaria and Celestia), either directly or through intermediaries.¹⁴⁰ Surveillance in the Republic was orchestrated and partly managed directly by the Inquisitors of State, who paid a series of informers appointed to monitor what happened in convents and who they were frequented by.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, extensive daily contact was made, at least in some convents, as a result of the complex interweaving of diplomacy and information exchange.¹⁴² Often aware of what was happening outside, nuns collected information from different sources so that they could then refer it to their closest contacts. In the 1680s, for example, Giovan Francesco Vezzosi, a gazetteer and spy in the service of the Duke of Modena, was one of many assiduous regulars at the convent of Sant'Alvise. The fact that his task was to supply his master with 'political information, as

¹³⁹ I will restrict myself to mentioning Pompeo Molmenti, *La storia di Venezia nella vita privata* (3 vols, Trieste: Lint, 1973), in particular volume 2.

¹⁴⁰ One of the many examples is that of Celestina Canal, a nun at Sant'Alvise, well known at the beginning of the eighteenth century for her dealings with the French ambassador: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 640, reports on 7 April, 5 September, 11 October 1705 and 12 March, 15 April, 21 May and 2 June 1706. Against this backdrop, the renowned episodes involving Giacomo Casanova, the nun M.M. (perhaps Marina Morosini) and the French ambassador François Joachim de Pierre de Bernis some decades later, which some think were invented, become much more plausible: Casanova, *History of My Life*, vol. 4, pp. 92ff.

¹⁴¹ Reports sometimes arrived via indirect means. In 1651, for example, it was the Captain of the Sant'Uffizio, Defendi Prudentino, who revealed some deals between the Spanish ambassador and several nuns: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 623, report by Giovanni Paolo Perugini on 6 March 1651.

¹⁴² Friars played a similar but not identical role. While nuns turned convents into centres for collecting and sorting information as they could not leave them, friars were able to travel around the city, exploit the international network of convents and make productive use of their relations with patrician houses, where they were often employed as tutors or clients.

well as “curious” printed matter and writing’¹⁴³ leads one to believe that these visits were not without interest or profit. Vezzosi developed particularly close relations with Sister Cassandra Mora, who he supplied with books and news in order to receive others in exchange. Among other things, he procured her a small book about sleeping drugs and poisons, an extremely interesting topic for those living in a convent, where matters between fellow sisters were often resolved by attempted poisonings or even by shooting.¹⁴⁴ The owner of the book, who the nun wanted to meet and for whom Vezzosi was acting as an intermediary, was Don Francesco Colli, a well-known unbeliever and magic enthusiast, a customer at Bernardone the bookseller’s *bottega* and in some way also connected to both the Duke of Parma¹⁴⁵ and the Inquisitor Tommaso Rovetta, who employed him as a proof-reader of books.¹⁴⁶ Colli cultivated the nun’s friendship, bringing her and entrusting her with other manuscripts about magic and heterodox texts

¹⁴³ Infelise, ‘Professione reportista’, p. 200.

¹⁴⁴ In April 1705 Sister Candida Canal shot her fellow sister Caterina Erizzo following a quarrel between them: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 640, anonymous report on 7 April 1705. Sister Candida received daily visits from the French ambassador among others: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 635, report by Rinaldo Tardini on 13 December 1709. Sister Cassandra also kept a shotgun in her cell: ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 125, Fra’ Paolo Moretti file, trial against Don Francesco Colli, deposition by Francesco Mellini on 15 January 1688. Poison was used quite frequently in both male and female monasteries. Indeed, death by poisoning was one of the main fears of friars and nuns. There is a suspected episode of the poisoning of a nun in the convent of Santa Caterina in Brescia in ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 185, ‘Vescovi e cardinali’ file, letter from Bishop of Brescia to the Inquisitors of State on 17 September and the Inquisitors’ reply on 19 September 1682. Indeed, literature about poisons was especially popular in cells and in the shadow of cloisters, often accompanied by hands-on practice. While there is considerable evidence of books that taught how to make them, in 1683 the confessor of the Nunzio, a certain Fra’ Pietro from San Francesco della Vigna, practised by poisoning dogs. Giving ‘poison to dogs without a reason so ordinarily’ was ‘a frequent act for this father ... and notorious’: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 652, report by an informer at Nunciature on 8 November 1683.

¹⁴⁵ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 125, Fra’ Paolo Moretti file, trial against Don Francesco Colli, written denunciation presented by Giovan Francesco Vezzosi on 13 January 1688.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., spontaneous appearance by Don Francesco Colli on 22 January 1688. Perhaps as a result of these reports, Don Francesco did not suffer any special consequences: they let him go with the order to report back at the court’s discretion. A few days later, however, a certain Don Rinaldo Rinaldi was sentenced to abjure *de veementi*. He had collaborated with Colli in various magic experiments and was a part of the same network of relations. Rinaldo reported under his own volition a few days after Colli, who had probably warned him, and appeared before the Inquisitor on 27 January. The abjuration form is dated the following day. The papers about Don Rinaldi are in the same file but are separated from the proceedings against Colli.

such as *De tribus impostoribus*.¹⁴⁷ It was probably as a result of this reading that she managed to find some ‘inaccuracies’ in the Gospels, ‘where she regarded all religious matters as inventions, invented by princes to keep the people in a state of fear and control their lives, as they did not fear worldly punishments very much.’¹⁴⁸ The nun was aware of all these things and discussed them with others, including Francesco Mellini, a doctor.¹⁴⁹

In more or less the same period, Cassandra received visits from Volmin, a *cavaliere*, adventurer and secretary at the French Embassy who had close relations with Federico Gualdi’s Rosicrucian group.¹⁵⁰ However, at the same time, with the backing of Bortolo Franceschi, Volmin could count on the friendship of some nuns from San Daniele, who probably belonged to the group that formed around Costanza Ruzini and her sister.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ It is difficult to say precisely which *Treatise of the Three Imposters* he was referring to, whether it was a Latin version of *Traité des trois imposteurs*, one of the main clandestine books in circulation between the end of the seventeenth century and the following century, or one of the many manuscripts with the same name that had been in circulation for a long time. In any case, it contained strongly heterodox essays putting forward themes ranging from the imposture of religion to atheism. The fact that such texts could be part of monastic reading is quite significant in terms of defining monastic culture. On the *Treatise*, see François Charles-Daubert, ‘Les Traités des trois imposteurs aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles’, in Guido Canziani (ed.), *Filosofia e religione nella letteratura clandestina. Secoli XVII e XVIII* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1994), pp. 291–336; Silvia Berti, ‘Introduzione’ in *Il trattato dei tre impostori. La vita e lo spirito del Signor Benedetto de Spinoza; Le ‘Traité des trois imposteurs’ et ‘l’Esprit de Spinoza’*. Philosophie clandestine entre 1678 et 1768, F. Charles-Daubert (ed.) (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1999); Johann Joachim Müller, *De imposturis religionum (De tribus impostoribus)*. Von den Betrugereyen der Religionen, W. Schröder (ed.) (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1999); Sergio Landucci, ‘Il punto sul De tribus impostoribus’, *Rivista storica italiana*, 3 (2000): 1036–71; Silvia Berti, François Charles-Daubert and Richard H. Popkin (eds), *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free Thought in Early-Eighteenth-Century Europe: Studies on the Traité des trois imposteurs* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010). The news that Tommaso Campanella was also suspected of being the author of the *Treatise* might also be of some interest. On this matter, see Tommaso Campanella, *Lettere*, V. Spampanato (ed.) (Bari: Laterza, 1927), pp. 107–8, letter to Kaspar Schoppe of 1 June 1607; Germana Ernst, ‘Campanella e il De tribus impostoribus’, *Nouvelles de la République des lettres*, 2 (1986): 143–70 and *Religione, ragione e natura. Ricerche su Tommaso Campanella e il tardo Rinascimento* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1991), pp. 105–33.

¹⁴⁸ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 125, Fra’ Paolo Moretti file, trial against Don Francesco Colli, deposition by Alessandro Mari on 15 January 1688.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., deposition by Francesco Mellini on 15 January 1688.

¹⁵⁰ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, report by Fra’ Costantino on 1 February 1672.

¹⁵¹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, report by Onorato Castelnovo on 26 April 1677.

The central role played by convents in the exchange and trading of information, along with everything that this entailed, can be seen from the care devoted to attempts to find inside contacts. The arrival of a Jesuit, Mattioli, at the convent of San Lorenzo in the capacity of confessor, for example, was in itself a minor political masterwork engineered by his nephew, Count Ercole Mattioli. The operation had been directed from the Venetian agent in Milan. In the space of a few days the Jesuit went to Venice and was assigned to the convent in the role of confessor. Mattioli needed a contact like this to collect information to sell to the Savoyards and the Duke of Mantua, from whom he received a salary. On 5 September 1676 he was able to state proudly that he had managed to make his Jesuit uncle the confessor to the nuns of San Lorenzo – ‘who are all the main ladies that one could say govern the Senate’ – ‘so that with great circumspection he will establish with me everything that needs to be done.’¹⁵² He was undoubtedly successful, although he might have had to deal with presumably fierce competition from Andrea Baba, a young enterprising gazetteer who had won the trust of two Badoer nuns at San Lorenzo.¹⁵³

It was widely known that convents were places of sociability. In 1728 Montesquieu had the impression that:

since women became more free, convents, where joy and pleasures used to be found, have become deserts. The lack of moderation of women in the world has made those who renounced the world more rigorous. There are still some nuns who joined the sisterhood only out of love of pleasure; only their old age consoles them.¹⁵⁴

It was a topos which was as much figurative as literary in nature. Let us take, for example, the scenes in eighteenth-century iconographic depictions. The ‘nuns’ parlour’ was really a genre in itself; the same elements were revisited with variations in the details in work ranging from prints by Petrus van der Aa of the parlour of San Lorenzo to Guardi and Tiepolo. There are images of swarms of nuns crowding around grates, some in habits and others dressed luxuriously, with an outside world characterized by frivolity and fun with conversations between prestigious gentlemen, noblemen, ladies, valets serving food, little stages for

¹⁵² ASTO, *Materie politiche per rapporto con l'estero, Lettere Ministri-Venezia, mazzo 13, fascicolo 6*, letters by Mattioli of 5 September 1676.

¹⁵³ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, report by Onorato Castelnovo on 24 November 1677.

¹⁵⁴ Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *Viaggio in Italia* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1995), p. 14.

puppet shows, performing animals and beggars at work, hoping to make a profit out of the social position of the visitors.¹⁵⁵

In 1683 the same French ambassador felt that it was not enough to take part in mundane discussions and meetings and commissioned a painting depicting 'a parlour with nuns wearing masks and carrying out highly scandalous lewd acts, which could not be any worse even in public', which he then had sent to Paris.¹⁵⁶ 'Touring the convents' was a recognized social activity and was very popular, although it was discouraged by the authorities. It was a way to practise both conversation and reading skills. Sometimes there were public readings, while on other occasions it was a slightly more private matter, such as on one evening in January 1681, when a 'masked man with a grey tabard' who was flirting with a young nun in the parlour of Sant'Andrea, first gave her a document to read and then took out a book and 'they read it out in turns up against the grate, with gestures, sounds and words of love'.¹⁵⁷

Some nuns like Sister Foscarina Foscarini at the convent of San Cosma turned out to be perfect hostesses and managed to prevent unpleasant encounters. Although the French ambassador and Don Ramiro Ravascherio, who had connections with the Spanish ambassador, were both regular visitors, 'she never lets one nation meet another during a visit, but she is essentially a close confidante of both embassies'. She received her Venetian friends during any remaining time.¹⁵⁸

Nuns were linked to the outside world through a dense network of relationships. In 1673, for example, a certain Antonia was a regular visitor to the convent of San Bernardo on Murano accompanied by her daughter, who was a prostitute. Antonia helped the nuns in daily chores that they did not have time to do alone: 'she put herself at the service of the young nuns, who are scandalous, and brings presents and letters back and forth to different men. To put it bluntly, she is a pander', as an anonymous written denunciation stated clearly. As chance would have it, Antonia lost one of these letters. When read out publicly, it was discovered that 'it contained things which would not even be found in a letter written to a public prostitute ... and not to virgin brides of Christ'. The woman begged for the letter not to be sent to the bishop, but after the danger had passed she continued her daily work as before, which was more or less as follows:

¹⁵⁵ Laven, *Virgins of Venice*, Figures 16 and 17.

¹⁵⁶ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 652, report by an informer at Nunciature on 22 March 1683.

¹⁵⁷ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 650, report by an informer at Nunciature on 27 January 1681.

¹⁵⁸ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, report by Onorato Castelnovo on 20 February 1672.

she takes letters to gentlemen and receives letters back from them and takes them to the nuns, and they are noblemen who are not relatives of the nuns. They are scandalous letters, and she not only takes them to noblemen, but also to clerics ... In the morning she sets off from the monastery on Murano with baskets and letters, and at the time when people go to the Rialto in the morning, she stops in her place – which is in San Salvador near the Scuola di San Todaro, near the barbershop and spice shop – and here she distributes the letters and receives others in return.¹⁵⁹

Through the opportunities offered by these contacts as well as readings, discussions and information filtering through from outside, nuns could feel that they had a representative role in a game which excluded them physically, the game of changing personal relations, shifting balances and worldliness which was being played outside. To a greater or lesser extent sociability practices in the city therefore entered convents and made them microcosms reproducing worldly tensions and ways of life concentrated into small enclosed spaces. The lives led behind convent walls were sometimes paradoxical, as people were forced to experience outside life indirectly through the mediation of frequently abundant supplies of words. The thoughts of Cecilia Sacrati and many others like her perhaps become easier to understand when seen from inside these contained spaces; they overflowed with streams of rebellious unrest to such an extent that even the court of the Inquisition found it difficult to understand them.

The Venice Inquisition: between moderation and repression

A worrying rumour started to circulate in the autumn of 1657. It was said that a sect was operating in the city, a 'school of atheist men, who claim that there is no other God than a fifth essence of elements and as a result all our good deeds are futile'. They were 'doctors, people of quality' and met in the rectory of San Marco under the leadership of Don Giovanni Bonicelli, the subdeacon of the same church.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ ASV, *Provveditori sopra monasteri*, b. 275, Antonia da Murano file, written documents of 9 August 1673. A certain Vincenza Caterina operated in the convent of San Maffio, where Cecilia Sacrati lived, with the same objectives: *ibid.*, Vincenza Caterina file. Both Antonia and Vincenza were warned after various witnesses had been examined on 25 September 1673.

¹⁶⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 108, trial against Zuanne Bonicelli, cc. n.n, spontaneous appearance by Don Francesco Tommasuccio on 4 September 1657.

The members, who as ‘people of quality’ were feared and respected, soon started to spread the word: a doctor identified only as Conti tried to persuade some people that ‘there is no place in the Scripture where you can find the institution of penitence’,¹⁶¹ while one of the members answered a priest who had told him during confession that he could only be absolved by going to the Sant’Uffizio to denounce his accomplices by saying ‘that this was a political manoeuvre to make him speak, and that I could absolve him because more than one priest had assured him of this. In fact he was running the risk of his life, and as I did not want to absolve him, he decided to follow another path and so went off’.¹⁶²

Don Giovanni Bonicelli, the main representative and leader of the sect, must have been quite young when he started associating with the heterodox world many years previously. In 1643 as a 19-year-old server he collected *secrets* from a printed book by Alberto Magno, put together an anthology and distributed it.¹⁶³ Subsequently, according to the declarations that witnesses attribute to him,

¹⁶¹ Ibid., deposition by Don Francesco Tommasuccio on 11 September 1657.

¹⁶² Ibid., deposition by Don Francesco Tommasuccio on 13 November 1657.

¹⁶³ This was most probably *De secretis mulierum*: ASV, Sant’Uffizio, b. 98, trial against Giorgio de Benedetti, deposition by Giovanni Bonicelli on 7 May 1643. Enclosed with the 1657 trial there is also an undated list of books for which Bonicelli had requested a reading licence. They were mostly astrological or astronomical texts: ASV, Sant’Uffizio, b. 108, trial against Zuanne Bonicelli. At the beginning of December 1657, with the trial halted for about a month, a written accusation was found in the Consiglio di Dieci’s box for anonymous denunciations, focusing most of all on the disciplinary aspects of Bonicelli’s conduct. It claimed that he did not comply with dietary precepts and spent the night out frequenting prostitutes. ‘In addition he states that he does not believe in the Catholic faith at all and he has never been seen saying the Breviary ... and in his room there are books on all the most damned subjects, but never the Breviary or another sacred text. His prayers are insolence, and his breviary consists of rapiers, shields, coats of mail, swords and the like’. After underlining that he could be found armed wherever he went at night, the denunciation moved on to matters more closely linked to the sphere of religious heterodoxy. A search of his room would have produced ‘every type of heretical writing, all damned and excommunicated, he deals in the diabolical art, magic, necromancy and similar things and has often made it understood that he conducts diabolical experiments, consecrating material during Mass, and that he does not consider it wrong to use priests’ robes and the Host to conduct diabolical experiments, keeping all kinds of writings, books and other things in his room for this purpose. His room is a mezzanine rented to him by the lawyer Bellato in Frezzaria, in Corte Nova’. The final part returned to the cleric’s behaviour; he was banished by the rectors of Vicenza for murder, under the false name of Father Francesco Moricchio. He was also a professed sodomite, ‘and when he has a woman in his power he makes her comply with all his detestable desires’: ASV, Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali, b. 90, anonymous written document dated 4 December

he must have combined his interest in the occult with libertine themes and new scientific theories.¹⁶⁴

What weapons were available to the Sant'Uffizio to combat this highly uneven situation whereby this extremely vague but widespread form of heterodoxy took deep root in centres of orthodoxy in a wide variety of different ways? The real danger not only lay in monasteries, schools of Christian doctrine and the restless nature of clerical life; a fundamental threat lay within the court itself. It was part of an organization which by its very nature was not able to deal with its enemy, even though it was one which did not appear to present the same dangers that the Reformation and other episodes connected to it had thrown up. A fight on a front as wide as unbelief or libertinism was destined to be lost and daily defeats, at least in the Venetian state, weakened the Sant'Uffizio even more. The words that the Inquisitor of Padua wrote to his Venetian colleague in 1664 reveal the sense of impotence in the work of the Inquisition, which had become routine and in which the figure of the Inquisitor no longer aroused much terror or mystery, but was at most considered to be a nuisance:

I never stop blessing the forces of those inquisitors who with calmness, timeliness and authority manage to satisfy both the conscience and justice. I am called on to set up defence trials and issue sentences, sentences, sentences, which I presume mean being sent home. Oh how freely they go to the inquisitor to receive a sentence: it is as if they had asked their cobbler to make them a pair of shoes, but to make them for Sunday.¹⁶⁵

1657, read in the Consiglio di Dieci on 11 December. The document was rejected even though it named many witnesses.

¹⁶⁴ Numerous heterodox groups were characterized by similar convergences of esoteric and libertine influences. See, for example, Melita Leonardi, 'Inquisizione, sette necromantiche e cabalistiche in Sicilia tra XVI e XVII secolo', *Rivista di Storia e Letteratura Religiosa*, 1 (2003): 65–99, at p. 91; see also, for similar connections, Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli*.

¹⁶⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 110, trial against Fra' Cherubino from Venezia and Fra' Giovan Battista from Este, letter from the Inquisitor of Padua, Fra' Giovanni Angeli, to his Venetian colleague, Fra' Agapito Ugoni on 18 August 1664, cc. n.n. Besides the doctrinal aspect, they also had to balance the books: in 1662 the Inquisitor of Padua could rely on an annual net income of 192 *scudi*. He owed 17 of these to the Inquisitor of Belluno, 7 to the Constable and 16 to the Commissioner. 'The 152 *scudi* left are needed to dress the inquisitor, buy food for three people, pay for letters, wood and oil, which is extremely expensive, and other typical Sant'Uffizio expenses, without counting the foreigners who turn up on Saint Anthony's day, and since the war with the Turks has been in progress there has been more than a third more food in Padua': ACDF, *St. St.*, GG 5-i, undated expenses note regarding 1662.

However, some years before in 1652 Nunzio Scipione Pannocchieschi's nephew had left this impression of the Sant'Uffizio's work:

In Venice there is the Court of the Santo Uffizio. I admire it a lot, as the Nunzio, Patriarch and so on meet twice a week. However, despite this exterior pomp, the court is here as a formality, given that usually only cases of little importance are examined: and this is something which is really shocking considering that there are many heretics in Venice and an open house because of the market, and there are no scruples about being buried in church. Besides these there is no lack of supporters of the beliefs of Cremonini, a former well-known lecturer at the University of Padua.¹⁶⁶

'The beliefs of Cremonini' should probably be interpreted in its broadest sense as the chaotic body of undefined doctrines that revolved around cornerstones such as the mortality of the soul or the political imposture of religion, which rarely created organized groups and were therefore much more allusive than Lutheran or Calvinist heresy. Even when some form of organization could be recognized, patricians were often found to be members of the resulting groups and, in keeping with a constant previously identified in the sixteenth century when acting against the Reformation, the Inquisition's ability to intervene regularly stopped on the threshold of noble palaces.¹⁶⁷

It was probably an awareness of the limits of their actions that led the Sant'Uffizio in Venice to prosecute a negligible number of the total of offences which came to their attention on a daily basis from depositions by those making denunciations or under investigation. They probably preferred to target the theological and moral indiscipline of the clergy, almost like an internal court, or the forms of mystic excess that were emerging within Catholicism. After all, there was no lack of this kind of work and, as we have seen in the Beccarelli affair, the success achieved was partly the result of active secular intervention. There was a kind of attempt to attack the hubs from which heterodoxy circulated at the end of the 1640s, in the anti-libertine climate determined by the trial against the printers Valvasense and Batti. Various trials were launched for reasons in some way connected to unbelief, and indeed for some years the repression of these crimes pushed the persecution of crimes of magic into the background, offences which accounted for the Inquisition's main involvement in Venice in the seventeenth century, even though very few trials resulted in a sentence. In

¹⁶⁶ Francesco Pannocchieschi, 'Venezia alla metà del secolo XVII', in Pompeo Molmenti, *Curiosità di storia veneziana* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1919), pp. 332–3.

¹⁶⁷ On this type of difficulty in the work of the Inquisition in Venice, see Ambrosini, *Storie di patrizi*.

the 1650s the work of the Inquisition started to lose impetus and stabilized in the field of ordinary administration, aimed at attacking – whenever possible – whoever could be attacked. Therefore, after emerging victorious from the clash with the Reformation, the Sant'Uffizio had to yield to the invisible opponent constituted by the secularization of consciences and institutions.

In general terms, the acceleration in the formation of solid arguments in favour of atheism and irreligiousness, which notionally took place in the late seventeenth century, probably had a confounding effect. It was an acceleration of which contemporaries were undoubtedly aware: in 1686 Jean Le Clerc was almost nostalgic for the libertines of past centuries who operated without a solid philosophical basis, unlike those he saw around him. The latter used philosophy and historical criticism as weapons so freely and daringly that they managed to shake the foundations of even the most sacred doctrines.¹⁶⁸ The worries of the Inquisition grew at the same time, focused more on high culture than on the extensive spread of fragmented theories. Nevertheless, the increase in the number of interventions made demonstrated the general rise in awareness of the problem. For example, at the same time atomism started to become the form of heterodoxy *par excellence*, influenced by libertine unrest to a greater or lesser extent:

we see everywhere a situation becoming tense. In '67 Cimento's great era comes to an end; between '69 and '70 the Investigators undergo a crisis and stop their work; in '70 the problems start for Marchetti's Italian version of Lucrezio; in '71 the Inquisitors alert the religious authorities in Naples regarding the 'philosophical opinions of a certain Renato de Cartes, who printed a new philosophical system in the past, reviving the ancient opinions of Greeks regarding atoms'; in April '89 there is a denunciation of Fardella to the Venetian Inquisitor for wanting to teach 'a certain Pietro Cartesio'; on 10 October '91 Cosimo III bans the teaching of atomistic philosophy in Pisa; in '91 the 'atheist' affair starts in Naples.¹⁶⁹

In this case it was a question of fighting Lucretian and Gassendian atomism and stopping it from confirming ideas and providing keywords even in its crudest forms, thereby providing new ammunition for scepticism and unbelief. For the libertines it was a first-rate philosophical back-up and turned out to be a particularly sharp polemical weapon. It was by no means difficult to find

¹⁶⁸ Jean Le Clerc, *Defense des sentiments des quelques theologiens de Hollande. Sur l'histoire critique du Vieux Testament. Contre la reponse du Prieur de Bolleville* (Amsterdam: Desbordes, 1686), pp. 219–20.

¹⁶⁹ Eugenio Garin, *Dal Rinascimento all'Illuminismo. Studi e ricerche* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1993), p. 96. The trial against the Neapolitan atheists actually started in 1688.

theories such as God's indifference towards human affairs, the mortality of the soul, the eternal nature of the world and its origin in chaos, and the desire to abolish all cults and religions. The campaign against scepticism and unbelief, which gradually adopted atomistic or libertine forms and content, continued incessantly until at least the 1730s, when it appeared that heterodox unrest was confined to Masonic lodges. As a result, persecution became focused on libertine groups thought to form the foundations of Masonry.

Nevertheless, at least in Venice, this 'situation becoming tense' did not produce overwhelming effects. The Inquisition's interest in Michelangelo Fardella, for example, came to nothing, a resolution which was repeated some time later with regard to Abbot Antonio Conti. This was at least partly the result of the resumption of the jurisdictional struggle which had created difficult moments in previous decades. After the end of the War of Castro in 1644 and with the almost simultaneous start of the war to safeguard Candia, which did not end until 1669, for decades the Republic almost seemed to draw back from the clashes and disputes that had previously seen it oppose Rome. After all, the progress of the war against the Turks did not leave many alternatives: Venice needed to yield rapidly – or at best reduce its demands – in exchange for financial, military and political support. The climate had inevitably changed since the Sarpian era: 'the meaning and points of reference of ecclesiastical politics had changed, increasingly approached in the key of daily exchanges in a diplomatic perspective aimed at defusing any possibility of conflict between the Republic and Rome'.¹⁷⁰ It was therefore not the right moment to seek conflict. From this point of view, the decision of the Riformatori dello Studio di Padova, which recognized the Inquisitor's right to grant printing licences, albeit implicitly,¹⁷¹ and even more so the almost simultaneous re-entry of the Jesuits into the city, clearly highlighted the difficulties that the Venetian government had to face at the time.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Barzazi, *Gli affanni dell'erudizione*, p. 334. On the whole question regarding the Consultori and ecclesiastical politics in that period see pp. 333–385. See also Antonella Barzazi, 'I consultori *in iure*', in *Storia della cultura veneta. Il Settecento*, (10 vols, Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1986), vol. 5/II, pp. 179–99.

¹⁷¹ On this question, see Mario Infelise, 'A proposito di *imprimatur*. Una controversia giurisdizionale di fine Seicento fra Venezia e Roma', in *Studi veneti offerti a Gaetano Cozzi* (Venice: Il Cardo, 1992), pp. 287–99.

¹⁷² See Gaetano Cozzi, 'La compagnia di Gesù a Venezia (1550–1657)', in *Venezia barocca*, pp. 289–323. Among the authors prohibited by the former group, Machiavelli met with undoubted success in the clandestine market: his works were distributed widely all over Italy throughout the seventeenth century, both through previously existing printed copies, sometimes from abroad, and manuscripts. See, for example, the many cases in ACDF, *St. St.*, O 2-m.

As the 1670s drew to a close, however, the political climate started to change in favour of a firm revival of Sarpi's teachings on jurisdictional issues. At the same time the figure of the Consultore in Iure regained prominence, a position introduced during the 1606 Interdict which had been the main instrument in the fight to safeguard the government's prerogatives against attempted interference from the Church for many years. In a broader picture of a return to issues regarding state sovereignty, the restraining aspect of the Inquisition's work took on new importance and translated into a constant attempt by the government to restrict the areas in which the ecclesiastical court could intervene. The resulting challenge, orchestrated between Venice and Rome, was played out in the open, especially in peripheral offices, in keeping with a fairly constant script.¹⁷³ First, the Sant'Uffizio imprisoned someone over whom, for one reason or another, the Rectors claimed legal jurisdiction, or the latter contested the arrest procedure or conduct of the investigations. A relevant letter was then sent to Venice and the Senate asked the Consultori for advice. They either threw the legitimacy of the judicial proceedings in progress into doubt or were careful to make the chance to continue the trial seem like an extraordinary concession. In other words, a literal interpretation of Sarpi's *Capitolare* made it easy to block all work by the Sant'Uffizio almost systematically. Rome and the Congregazione did not accept the situation with equanimity, but the concerted resistance of the government against the ambassadors in Rome and the Rectors in cities on the mainland on the one hand and the intransigence – or what was presented as benevolent condescension in some cases – demonstrated towards the Nunzio's protests on the other hand had the effect of curbing the Inquisition's work beyond any hope of recovery.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Apart from exceptional cases – such as the one regarding Calvinist groups operating in the city in the second half of the seventeenth century, with regard to which, see Barbierato, 'Luterani, calvinisti e libertini' – perhaps because of the presence of the Savi all'Eresia (Three Wise Men on Heresy) and the greater opportunities to control the Inquisitor's movements, it was mostly possible in Venice to prevent quarrels over single episodes becoming political and diplomatic matters. Indeed, as a general rule both parties managed to avoid reaching breaking point.

¹⁷⁴ It is not possible here for me to undertake a detailed analysis of the innumerable cases which saw the government authorities and the Venetian Inquisitors oppose each other. Those presented in brief are conclusions that appear to be clear on the basis of documentation from the period. See the archive series of the ASV with regard to the years between approximately 1680 and 1720: *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma Expulsis papalistis*; *Senato, Dispacci Roma*; *Senato, Dispacci Expulsis*; *Collegio, Esposizioni Roma*; and the *Decreta* of the Congregazione in Rome kept at the ACDF. The best study on the field is Fabiana Veronese, "Terra di nessuno". *Misto foro e conflitti tra Inquisizione e magistrature secolari nella Repubblica di Venezia (XVIII sec.)*, PhD thesis (Venice: Università Ca' Foscari, 2010). There

Therefore, although some general measures and practices were coordinated and organized by the Congregazione in Rome, peripheral courts effectively had few opportunities to intervene because they were forced to deal with a variety of situations and compromises which limited their ability to act and their manoeuvring space. Control of the repressive system had to rely on an extensive deep-rooted organization which, however, encountered increasing difficulties in justifying itself and its presence following the lull in the emergency created by the Reformation. Furthermore, the Venetian court needed political power in order to work and show its strength in local branches; without this support its weapons were ineffective. It seems, however, that this form of back-up was not generally supplied on the basis of moral considerations or the religious beliefs of those who had that power, but rather according to the potential social repercussions of heterodox phenomena. This does not mean that the governing class in Venice was not involved in any kind of moral assessment or religious sentiment. At least in principle many patricians agreed with the court's conduct and aims, and identified the individuals prosecuted as enemies. The death sentences handed down for the abuse of sacraments from the early eighteenth century onwards bear dramatic testimony to this.¹⁷⁵

On the other hand, on the basis of law in Venice, as far as the Sant'Uffizio was concerned, it would have been difficult to avoid these sentences: the abuse of a sacrament was unquestionably a matter for the Sant'Uffizio, as Sarpi had recognized. However, the jurisdictional aspect implicit in a faithful application of the *Capitolare* also emerged from this point of view. It was a question of launching a message and making it clear that the established line had to be followed rigidly. The assumption was clear: nobody could question the Inquisition's ability to intervene within the areas it controlled. The latter had been guaranteed by the government but defined in such a way that only a few offences were the Inquisition's undisputed responsibility. The fixing of trial procedures had been devised in order to make it easy to lay claim to deviations from the norm and thereby invalidate trials in progress. It was only a question of accepting approved laws, which the Republic had simply decided to apply in full. No protest from the pontiff could have been justified in this respect.

Although there were many fluctuations, it was a policy quite far removed from theological matters, an attitude which was basically very similar to the

were also direct attacks on various courts, such as the case of the long-running dispute about vicars forane – see ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma expulsis papalistis*, ff. 11, 19–22 – or the case about an *imprimatur*: Infelise, 'A proposito di *imprimatur*'.

¹⁷⁵ To this end, see the analysis in Fabiana Veronese, 'L'orrore del sacrilegio. Abusi di sacramenti, pratiche magiche e condanne a morte a Venezia nel primo ventennio del Settecento', *Studi Veneziani*, 52 (2006): 265–342.

one which had characterized the years of the Reformation in Venice, namely 'a detachment from doctrinal disputes' in favour of a strong interest in the political aspects of religion.¹⁷⁶ It was a policy which aimed to leave no more freedom than was strictly necessary to an institution perceived as a foreign body within the realm of Venetian power. The main objective was therefore to safeguard its autonomy; religiousness would perhaps be addressed later, not so much because it was not considered to be an urgent problem, but because ultimately it was felt that it could be kept under control without outside help. People had known since Sarpi's time that crimes persecuted by the Inquisition could be dealt with on various grounds by the Esecutori Contro la Bestemmia or the Consiglio di Dieci, so there was no need for a court run by another state.¹⁷⁷

The Sant'Uffizio therefore became a stage for the continual oscillation between politics and religion that I have already hinted at. Due to its very nature and make-up, the Venetian court in particular was a closely interwoven network of responsibilities and interests. For example, the Inquisitor was a Dominican friar, but by the express wish of the Venetian government was usually a subject of the Republic. Equally, the Patriarch was also a subject, or rather a Venetian patrician. The three Savi all'Eresia, the lay magistracy set up by the government alongside the ecclesiastical body when the court was introduced, theoretically had the task of providing assistance in order to attack heresy more effectively and safeguard the priorities of secular power. However, it was the latter task that was performed more adequately and diligently as a result of more constant surveillance. The Nunzio was the only real remaining representative of religious power who was directly dependent on Rome, essentially the only figure who did not have to interpose the barrier of institutional relations and personal ties with Venice between himself and his work.¹⁷⁸ A court of this kind was in itself

¹⁷⁶ Ambrosini, *Storie di patrizi*, p. 20. In 1677, when the Jansenist question did not yet seem to constitute a major problem for the Republic from a political point of view, the Nunzio Carlo Francesco Airoidi wrote to Rome that Jansen's doctrine did not arouse much interest in the patriciate because 'besides the fact that many of them do not understand, it does not attract anyone's attention or thoughts because it is not a political matter and is not relevant to the Republic': ASVat, *Segreteria di Stato, Venezia*, f. 117, c. 177r, 15 May 1677.

¹⁷⁷ On the matter, see obviously Sarpi, 'Sopra l'ufficio dell'Inquisizione'. The erosion of the Inquisition's responsibilities sometimes produced unforeseen results, such as in 1683 when the Consiglio di Dieci undertook to proceed against Judaizers Antonio Molin and Francesco Tron. The Consiglio decided not to take any action against Marco Levi and Giuseppe Vida Almeda, the two Jews who had persuaded them to return to Judaism: ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 116, 8 March 1683.

¹⁷⁸ On the structure and origins of the court in Venice, see Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press*; Paul F. Grendler, 'The Tre Savii sopra eresia 1547–1605: A Prosopographical Study', *Studi veneziani*, n.s., 3 (1979): 233–40; Anne Jacobson Schutte,

a political body, inasmuch as it had to guarantee stability beyond the judicial field, and it was not uncommon for it to assume a leading diplomatic role. As Nunzio Carlo Francesco Airoidi recalled in 1676, the Sant'Uffizio was 'the only opportunity' to meet a nobleman and 'casually address certain subjects, but with the effect of discovering something about the direction in which the Senate's decisions may go'.¹⁷⁹ This opportunity was so important that without it there were no possibilities for any kind of political agreement or negotiations to reach one.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, sometimes the Inquisitor had to be contacted, as he enjoyed greater freedom of movement and could meet patricians and thereby mediate between the parties.¹⁸¹ In this sense the instructions the nuncius Laudio Zacchia was given in 1621, on his way to Venice, were clear: he should have 'attend to the tribunal of the Holy Office with great care, not to omit attending the usual sessions and ably propose some reflections, which should also benefit the other parties, once the three aristocrats who are present have heard them'.¹⁸²

It was precisely this mediation role that characterized the political role of the Sant'Uffizio: 'in reality, the ecclesiastical court that laid claim to extremely rigid canon law, ancient traditions, proud autonomy and absolute authority had to accept all kinds of irregularities every time that the state authorities believed it to be necessary'.¹⁸³ After all, as an anonymous manuscript containing instructions for inquisitors kept in the archive of the Venetian Sant'Uffizio observed, 'the duty of the Inquisition consists of giving satisfaction to the pope, secular princes, their ministers, kings, the people and subjects. All this is done through

'Uno spazio, tre poteri. La cappella di San Teodoro, sede dell'Inquisizione veneziana', in Antonio Niero (ed.), *San Marco. Aspetti storici e agiografici* (Venice: Marsilio, 1996), pp. 97–109; Brian Pullan, *The Jews of Europe and the Inquisition of Venice, 1550–1670* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), Part I; Ruth Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice, 1550–1650* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp. 9–33. On the functioning of the Venetian court within the context of the Venetian Inquisition network, see Andrea Del Col, 'Organizzazione, composizione e giurisdizione dei tribunali dell'Inquisizione romana nella repubblica di Venezia (1500–1550)', *Critica storica*, 25 (1988): 155–67, and 'L'Inquisizione romana e il potere politico nella repubblica di Venezia (1540–1560)', *Critica storica*, 28 (1991): 189–250. See also Federico Barbierato, 'Venezia', in *DSI*, vol. 3, pp. 1657–60 and Christopher F. Black, *The Italian Inquisition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), in particular pp. 31–7.

¹⁷⁹ ASVat, *Segreteria di Stato, Venezia*, f. 117, c. 101r, 5 December 1676.

¹⁸⁰ ASVat, *Segreteria di Stato, Venezia*, f. 123, c. 14r, 5 October 1680.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., c. 32v, 22 August 1682.

¹⁸² Klaus Jaitner (ed.), *Die Hauptinstruktionen Gregors XV. Für die nuntien und gesandten an den Europäischen fürstenhöfen 1621–1623* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1997), p. 224.

¹⁸³ Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, p. 102.

science and prudence depending on the circumstances and the times'. It was for this reason that the Inquisitor had to demonstrate 'prudence and dexterity', consisting 'mainly of knowledge of the subject and the people dealt with'. To this end, the little manual recommended reading 'political books', in particular 'some observations by Lipsius, others by Cornelius Tacitus. The *Istruzione* by Fabio Albergati to the cardinal of San Sisto in the first part of *Tesoro politico*. See the titles *De officio iudicis*, and especially Follerio's *verbo seu rubrica*'.¹⁸⁴

The Sant'Uffizio in Venice in particular was a composite structure used to relieve tensions between Venice and Rome, which politicians and diplomats moving between the two states referred to. It was ultimately the focal point where the two powers met and clashed: on one side Rome, the Congregazione del Sant'Uffizio with its directives, and on the other side the Republic, forced to cohabit with a largely foreign court, to which it did not seem inclined to give any more freedom than necessary for peaceful cohabitation. Consequently the Inquisition's actions were dependent on many different elements which interacted on as many levels. On the first level the system was under strain, generated by the political and jurisdictional clash unleashed on this hybrid court. The second level of this network of conflicts featured a series of micro-events connected to both the contingencies of the moment and whichever individuals happened to be interacting. This created changes in the general situation and at the same time these changes contributed to determining new behaviour in individuals.¹⁸⁵ The Sant'Uffizio cannot therefore be considered separately from the dynamics of its relations with society and Venetian political power.¹⁸⁶ The way in which it conducted business was at any given time a function of the individual personalities of members, above all the Nunzio, the environmental conditions and the political climate, as well as a number of events which might not seem apparent from the general dynamics of the system.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 153, anonymous undated small manual.

¹⁸⁵ The concept of the situation was proposed in the psychosocial field by Kurt Lewin. Only by the concrete whole which comprises the object and the situation are the vectors which determine the dynamics of an event: Kurt Lewin, *A Dynamic Theory of Personality* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1935), pp. 29–30.

¹⁸⁶ The need to put the brakes on the work of the Inquisition is not only found in Venice but more or less everywhere increasingly during the seventeenth century. As Prosperi states: 'the multicolour reality of political power and social privilege is reflected ... in the structure of the Inquisition: the results, which varied enormously, shared the common need to limit the autonomy and secrecy of the Inquisitors by introducing other figures into the court': Prosperi, *Tribunali della coscienza*, p. 108.

¹⁸⁷ An approach could be applied to the study of the Venetian Inquisition, which took account of the concept of 'figuration' put forward by Norbert Elias. Borrowing terminology from the theory of games, he defines it as a 'changing pattern created by the players as a

For example, Cecilia Stuart, who was at the centre of an interesting political case in around 1739, was aided by diplomatic considerations with forceful intervention from the Inquisitors of State and a somewhat obliging friar.¹⁸⁸ Cecilia Ongarato – her maiden name – was a cook's daughter from Padua who

whole – not only by their intellects but by their whole selves, the totality of their dealings in their relationships with each other. It can be seen that this figuration forms a flexible lattice-work of tensions. The interdependence of the players, which is a prerequisite of their forming a figuration, may be an interdependence of allies or of opponents': Norbert Elias, *What is Sociology?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 130. See also Norbert Elias, *The Court Society* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2006), in which the model is applied to an analysis of tensions within the court, and *The Civilizing Process. Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), in particular pp. 363–438, but the whole work is based on this concept. One attempt in this respect was undertaken by Angelo Torre in his study of the devotional practises of laymen in the *Ancien Régime* Piedmont countryside. Torre speaks about a 'system of reciprocal tensions – a configuration': Angelo Torre, *Il consumo di devozioni. Religione e comunità nelle campagne dell'Ancien Régime* (Venice: Marsilio, 1995), p. 13.

¹⁸⁸ Between the 1730s and 1740s – years moreover characterized by strong opposition within the patriciate between groups connected to the jurisdictional tradition and pro-curial groups close to the Jesuits; see the observations on this matter in Montesquieu, *Viaggio in Italia*, p. 19, dated 1728 – there was no lack of episodes in which the work of secular magistrates such as the Inquisitors of State intersected with that of the Sant'Uffizio or in some way touched on religious principles. Precisely because of the conflict in progress, it is difficult to interpret events in the period clearly and understand the real reasons for some decisions, such as that in 1730 which led the Inquisitors of State to refer Giovanni Checcozzi, a canon from Vicenza, to the Sant'Uffizio, in whose prison he remained for six long years under the charge of Jansenism. This charge was also a serious concern for the lay authorities, who, as we have already seen, banished the 'Jansenist' Luigi Valiselli from the city in 1709: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1256, *Note di priggioni, Sfratti*, 12 September 1709 and b. 529–30, c. 46r. There is a further testimony to lay surveillance of the phenomenon in ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 303, letter from the Podestà of Padua Marco Ruzini on 11 October 1709. On the sensational Checcozzi case, see Paolo Preto, *ad vocem*, in *DBI*; Vecchi, *Correnti religiose del Sei-Settecento veneto*, pp. 273ff.; and Barzazi, *Gli affanni dell'erudizione*, pp. 66–7. With Checcozzi still in prison, in the summer of 1735 the shadow of the Jesuits loomed up behind the Inquisition trial against Abbot Antonio Conti, which started almost at the same time as the expulsion of Giannone, one of Conti's friends, from the state at the hands of the Inquisitors of State, in a climate poisoned by 'a group of "zealous" pro-curial patricians'. These nearly also included the *revisore alle stampe* Carlo Lodoli, who in any case was expelled a few years later between December 1741 and the following January. For the episodes involving Giannone and Conti, see the previously cited bibliography. On Lodoli, see Mario Infelise, 'Carlo Lodoli revisore dei libri', in Carlo Lodoli, *Sulla censura dei libri. 1730–1736*, M. Infelise (ed.) (Venice: Marsilio, 2001), pp. ix–xxi, at p. xvi; Gianfranco Torcellan, *Una figura della Venezia settecentesca, Andrea Memmo. Ricerche sulla crisi dell'aristocrazia veneziana* (Venice and Rome: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1963), pp. 30–37; Piero Del

had taken the opportunity to marry William Stuart, an English descendant of James II. After the couple moved to Venice in 1737 she was accused of heretical propositions, reading and the possession of prohibited books and other minor charges, which led her to be imprisoned in the Sant'Uffizio prison on 22 February 1739.¹⁸⁹ The English consul took swift action against the Inquisitors of State, visiting the Court Secretary at home after just a few hours to protest about the treatment doled out to the wife of a 'knight baronet and subject of the King of England' who 'had brought a lot of money to Venice, a large amount, and public investments had been made on his deposits'.¹⁹⁰ On the following day after being informed, the Inquisitors of State ordered the Secretary to negotiate her release with the Inquisitor of the Sant'Uffizio. After stalling for a while, feeling somewhat intimidated by the complications appearing before him, the latter cautiously suggested that one way out could be an escape from prison, as everything was pointing towards a problematic trial. If she escaped, nobody would have to assume the responsibility of giving official orders. The only problem was that in cases of escape from Inquisition prisons, the normal procedure was to launch a trial against the Captain of the Sant'Uffizio. Nevertheless, the Inquisitor, Fra' Paolo Manuelli, was convinced that it would be possible to put 'aside the trial after making some investigations, in which nothing would be found'. As if crushed by a weight, 'he repeated a second time, shrugging his shoulders, if she escaped, the matter would be finished'. I think that, all things considered, the Secretary could not have hoped for a better solution. The important thing now was not to betray anything about the conversation and in this respect the Inquisitor was zealous: before leaving, he asked the Secretary to refer to the Inquisitors of State 'that he was a good subject, and that he had Saint Mark in his heart'.¹⁹¹

General inquisitors in Venice tended to have St Mark in their hearts because they were subjects. As previously suggested, it was not a rigidly established rule but rather a widespread custom that the Venetian Inquisitor was a subject, and this was a point which the government always made a point of highlighting. The Patriarch, a patrician, was also a subject and an integral part of the court.

Negro, 'Politica e cultura nella Venezia di metà Settecento: la "poesia barona" di Giorgio Baffo "Quarantiotto"', *Comunità*, 184 (1982): 312–425.

¹⁸⁹ The Inquisition trial can be found in ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 142, trial against Cecilia Stuart. The Secretary of the Inquisitors of State's perspective on events is in ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 532, cc. 30v *et seq.* There is a more detailed reconstruction of the episode in Federico Barbierato, "Con soggiongerli, che avesse prudenzia". Brevi note sui retroscena di un processo veneziano del 1739', *Storia di Venezia-Rivista*, 2 (2004): 79–90.

¹⁹⁰ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 532, c. 30v, written document by the Secretary on 7 March 1739.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, c. 32r.

The Secretary referred to the Patriarch immediately after having spoken to the Inquisitor. Their conversation took place along the lines of the previous one, but avoided pointless preliminaries: both the prelate and the Secretary knew full well how much weight an order or even just an explicitly expressed desire from the Inquisitors of State carried. It was therefore possible to speak openly. The Patriarch guaranteed his collaboration in raising problems related to arrest procedures, but recommended 'dealing with the assistants' who should theoretically have been more malleable in keeping to their role, which involved safeguarding the interests of the Republic within the court. Nevertheless, when the case was heard at the Sant'Uffizio, they showed little inclination for debate: given that they had signed an arrest order, they did not intend to withdraw it. Clearly, on this occasion – official and already fraught – no mention was made of a possible escape by Cecilia. The Patriarch and the Inquisitor limited themselves to highlighting the difficulties connected to the arrest. The assistants, however, proved to be unshakeable.

Faced with an unexpected obstacle, on the evening of 19 February the Inquisitors of State decided that things had already dragged on too long, summoned the Captain of the Sant'Uffizio, Zuanne Durigello, and ordered him to 'let the woman leave prison the same night, and that he had to pretend and say that she had escaped, embellishing the story with some pretence. He was entrusted to obey in this way and never speak about it on pain of death'.¹⁹² While the Captain was making his way back to the prison to let Cecilia escape, the Secretary headed for the monastery of San Domenico to inform the Inquisitor. He was certainly terrified about the possible effects of the fix he was involved in, but limited himself to repeating that he had 'Saint Mark in his heart' and was 'a good subject of my prince'.¹⁹³ The Savi all'Eresia also listened to what the Secretary had to say with St Mark in their hearts. All that remained now was to give approval; the tone used was not very argumentative and the words employed were extremely clear.

In this way, when the Captain of the Sant'Uffizio appeared on 26 February to explain how Cecilia had escaped after attacking his wife, the Inquisitor played his part admirably by feigning surprise and anger, suggesting the immediate formation of a trial and forcing the Captain to present a written report of events. Furthermore, in an attempt to give everything a semblance of legality, he even asked the Captain to swear on the Gospel.¹⁹⁴ He duly did this without any problems and presented his written report a few days later. It said – with

¹⁹² Ibid., c. 32v.

¹⁹³ Ibid., c. 33r.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., c. 33v.

syntactic and logical uncertainties partly due to the need to invent the facts – that on the evening of the escape he had gone as usual to give the prisoner her dinner:

and while she was giving it to her, my wife felt ill, as she often does. I locked the door and ran to call Di Piero, the doctor, but they told me that he wasn't at home, and when I went back I found my wife and daughter crying. I asked what had happened and they told me that the prisoner had started shouting 'oh my God, I'm dying', so the child had taken the key and opened the door to see what she wanted, and the prisoner had jumped up and started slapping and punching her and in the end escaped.¹⁹⁵

In the meantime, Cecilia had not even been worried enough to leave the city and had simply gone back to her home in the parish of San Felice, not very far from the Sant'Uffizio prison. After informing the English consul of the escape with some relief, the Secretary underlined that it would at least be opportune – although certainly not obligatory – for husband and wife to leave the city for some time as a mark of respect towards the Sant'Uffizio and to show that the court was 'independent in those matters'. The Secretary explained that they could go wherever they wanted, but that it might be better to avoid Padua, where the arrest had been carried out. After even further encouragement, William and Cecilia Stuart finally left on 2 March for an unspecified destination in the Treviso

¹⁹⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 142, trial against Cecilia Stuart, written document dated 3 March 1739. It was not the first time that a captain of the Sant'Uffizio had had to exonerate himself by compromising under oath. In 1691 the ease with which Captain Turchetto was able to swear something so clearly false as 'I don't believe that God is God any more if he was ever at home after having left. And may God suddenly strike me down dead!' showed a certain facility and wont to resort to false divine testimony, and a certain indifference towards the deities involved: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 126, trial against Captain Turchetto, letter of 10 July 1691 from Elia Borghi and Alfonso di Malta to the Sant'Uffizio. See also ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 120, 31 August 1691 and 30 December 1692 and b. 121, 12 January 1694. Unlike what happened in other similar cases, in the episode of Cecilia's escape the Captain's wife was not called to testify. See, for example, ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 91, trial against Paolo Baruffo. In 1711 Captain Giuseppe David was imprisoned on the charge of having granted, in exchange for various payments, 'freedom for the prisoners to roam outside the prisons assigned to them'. Instead, he applied a more restrictive regime to those who were unable to pay, depriving them of food and the opportunity get hold of it. A female prisoner that he tried to seduce was encouraged to 'satisfy him in order not to be subjected to his iniquitous persecutions'. He probably felt dissatisfied with what he managed to pocket 'given that he had usurped ... a large amount of public bread by pretending that there were more prisoners than there really were': ASV, *Consiglio di Dieci, Parti criminali*, b. 130, 9 June and 25 September 1711.

area. Rather than a banishment, it was much more like a request for cooperation for diplomatic purposes. Indeed, they were told that they could return to Venice if they wanted after letting a certain amount of time pass, as long as they gave the Inquisitors of State some advance warning.¹⁹⁶ There is only one entry relating to all this in the Sant'Uffizio records:

This document is added to serve as a memorandum: no more progress has been made with the trial or regarding the escape narrated by Captain Zuane Durigello because, as heard from Mr Gasparo Marini secretary [of the Inquisitors of State], the escape took place on the supreme order of the Inquisitors of State, as it was the same secretary who on the late night of Thursday 26 February – the night when the escape took place – informed the Inquisitor [of the Sant'Uffizio] about it, by order, as he said, of the Inquisitors of State. He added that the Inquisitor would better be prudent.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 532, c. 34r, written document by the Secretary on 7 March 1739.

¹⁹⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 142, trial against Cecilia Stuart, undated written document. In reality the escape had taken place exactly one week before on 19 February. The Sant'Uffizio meeting on 26 February was forgotten.

Chapter 5

Books, Readers and a Hatter's Library

Censorship and secrecy

In 1717, following repeated requests, the Republic asked the Inquisitor Fra' Tommaso Gennari to explain why it had not been possible to print the vernacular translation of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*. After all, the original Latin version was not 'nominally ... in the Index of prohibited books'. Furthermore, although the fact was not mentioned, the first London edition had just been published.¹ The Inquisitor explained patiently that 'the philosophy of Titus Lucretius Carus (a Gentile by birth, and of the Epicurian sect)'² was 'scattered with impious feelings' and did not figure in the *Index* because it shared the fate of many other works by Latin and Greek Gentiles, left in circulation 'in its native language for reasons of scholarship'. Although the translation was certainly no less erudite or 'less obscure than the original', it did not deserve the same condescension 'considering the danger of some wicked effects it could create in the souls of less cautious people or libertines, who frequently have knowledge of the vernacular'. This consideration was based 'on experience', the experience in question having been the Neapolitan 'atheists' 30 years previously:

With regard to this matter I have to give notice that in approximately 1680 or shortly afterwards (if I am not mistaken) the same philosophy of Lucretius, translated into the vernacular, as printed in Naples, where it first aroused curiosity and then created pleasure, leading to an attack of such magnitude that in a short time the famous sect of atheists was formed, protected by some prominent figures

¹ Tito Lucrezio Caro, *Della natura delle cose libri sei*. Tradotti da Alessandro Marchetti lettore di filosofia e matematiche nell'universita di Pisa et accademico della Crusca (London: Giovanni Pickard, 1717). The edition was edited by Paolo Rolli and was dedicated to the Prince of Savoy, Eugenio Francesco.

² The words used by the Inquisitor, 'Gentile by birth, and of the Epicurian sect', repeated verbatim those of Alessandro Marchetti in *Protesta del traduttore a' lettori*, drafted in around 1668 and later printed. There is an identical passage, although the rest of the version is slightly different, in *Giornale de' letterati d'Italia* (40 vols, Venice: Hertz, 1715), pp. 242–3, and Mario Saccenti, *Lucrezio in Toscana* (Florence: Olschki, 1966), pp. 98–9.

and under the deceptive name of the Atomists, who caused a great stir, especially in that city, and are still talked about today.³

Fra' Tommaso Gennari concluded that this could not happen in Venice because of the constant vigilance shown in previous years in not allowing it to be printed, despite great demand.⁴ Following the Inquisitor's report, dated 31 May 1717, things started moving quickly. While on 22 May Apostolo Zeno still had doubts about the advisability of referring to the London edition in the *Giornale de' letterati*, on 19 June he abandoned any intention to do so: 'the news of the

³ ASV, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, b. 370, written document by Inquisitor Fra' Tommaso Gennari on 31 May 1717. I have not found any trace of a Neapolitan version from the 1680s and I believe that it never existed. The Inquisitor might have assumed that the abundance of copies in circulation around Italy, especially in Naples and Venice, was due to printing. Indeed, there were so many that in 1715 Apostolo Zeno said 'there is an infinite number of copies around': Apostolo Zeno, *Lettere di Apostolo Zeno cittadino Veneziano storico e poeta cesareo. Nelle quali si contengono molte notizie attenenti all'istoria letteraria de' suoi tempi; e si ragiona di libri, d'iscrizioni, di medaglie, e d'ogni genere d'erudita antichità* (3 vols, Venice: Pietro Valvasense, 1752), vol. 1, p. 377. A huge number of copies of the translation, made between 1664 and 1669, were distributed from the early 1670s onwards. Apostolo Zeno also refers to a printing project in Naples, but in 1715. Attempts were made to create editions in Paris and Florence in 1668 and 1670 respectively. On the matter, see Saccenti, *Lucrezio in Toscana*, pp. 83 and 86–7, and Gabriel Maugain, *Etude sur l'évolution intellectuelle de l'Italie de 1657 à 1750 environ* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1909), pp. 136–43. Instead, the events regarding the trial against the 'atheists' in Naples – which the Inquisitor was undoubtedly referring to – came later, as it started in 1688. No major trial had been conducted with similar charges previously. See Luciano Osbat, *L'inquisizione a Napoli. Il processo agli ateisti 1688–1697* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1974), which underlines its importance in various areas. On the general links between libertinism and Lucretian and Gassendian Atomism, see Vincenzo Ferrone, *Scienza natura religione. Mondo newtoniano e cultura italiana nel primo Settecento* (Naples: Jovene editore, 1982). On the reception of Lucretius in the modern age, see at least Rémy Poignault (ed.), *Présence de Lucrèce* (Tours: Centre de Recherches A. Piganiol, 1998), especially Part III; Marco Beretta and Francesco Citti (eds), *Lucrezio, la natura e la scienza* (Florence: Olschki, 2008). On Lucretius' fortunes in the sixteenth century, see Valentina Prosperi, *'Di soavi licor gli orli del vaso'. La fortuna di Lucrezio dall'Umanesimo alla Controriforma* (Turin: Aragno, 2004).

⁴ There had been no lack of attempts in this respect. As far back as 28 August 1700, Apostolo Zeno tried to persuade Marchetti to agree to publication, which he intended to entrust to 'a respectable bookseller in this city' who was already selling handwritten copies. Considering the relations and attitudes, it is plausible that this bookseller was Giovanni Gabriele Hertz, who Zeno admired as 'one of the most honest and civil that I have ever met'. However, Zeno was also well aware of the censorship difficulties: Saccenti, *Lucrezio in Toscana*, p. 97. The comments about Hertz are taken from Infelise, *L'editoria veneziana nel '700*, p. 30.

prohibition of Marchetti's translation of Lucretius here in Venice for reasons of public order is completely true. I shall not speak about it any more in the journal'.⁵

The Inquisitor felt that the success of Lucretius in Naples had progressed through stages of curiosity, enjoyment and influence, and that this 'atomists' bible' had produced devastating effects.⁶ These three characteristics were seen as typical of libertines, three reactions by shrewd readers which had to be prevented and combated. The only way to do this was to prevent the raw reading material from being available in the first place. While a compromise could be made on the original Latin version, which only a few would be able to understand in any case, the translation would make a potentially explosive device available to everyone. It therefore had to be handled with care. Those who knew Latin were able to carry out this task, but they were a limited group of people who were easier to control and regulate than the increasingly growing group of 'less cautious people or libertines', who were only able to read in the vernacular.⁷ The reason for the lack of 'contagion' in Venice was not because there was no audience – why would they have persisted so much in attempting to publish if

⁵ Zeno, *Lettere di Apostolo Zeno*, vol. 1, pp. 430 and 433. A month later Zeno adopted an even more cautious attitude in a letter to Muratori, informing him on 24 July that the Riformatori dello Studio di Padova had prohibited the book, 'and are totally right to do so': Vecchi, *Correnti religiose del Sei-Settecento veneto*, p. 185. In July 1716 Muratori had done his best to persuade the Duke of Modena to accept the dedication that the editor of the London version wanted to add to the text. Although he was initially favourable, after a few days the Duke changed his mind, thinking that the book would definitely be prohibited and would thus cause him some embarrassment. This did not, however, prevent him from admiring the work greatly when he received it the following year: Muratori, *Epistolario*, vol. 5, pp. 1821–2, letter 1650, to Giuseppe Riva in London, dated Modena, 24 July 1716 and *ibid.*, p. 1879, letter 1716, to Giuseppe Riva in London, dated Modena, 16 June 1717.

⁶ Reading Lucretius could have devastating effects on faith: in 1765 Giovanni Antinoni, from Camerino, told the Sant'Uffizio in Rome that he had read him in Lisbon in 1758. He had become so passionate about the doctrine that 'about four years later I convinced myself to abandon the good faith that I had and to adhere to his propositions, in particular believing in a God who, completely immersed in His glory, did not attend to the lower things on earth, letting them go according to their inclination and destiny. [And I adhered] too to the other errors found in that book about the immortality of the soul, heaven and hell'. Giovanni was sure that he had never really been abandoned by God 'despite having sought in all ways to suppress the principles of the true faith': ACDF, *St. St.*, O 2–m, 20 July 1764, cc. 63r–v.

⁷ The combination suggested that he had noted how the 'libertines' were a widespread but varied social group, ranging from educated strong spirits to individuals of medium or low cultural calibre. On the problems of translations into the vernacular – and more generally of the ecclesiastical attitude towards it – see Gigliola Fragnito, *Proibito capire. La Chiesa e il volgare nella prima età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005).

there had been no expectations in this respect? – but because they had been kept in the dark about the work.

The control system for the production of books in Venice was well established by the late sixteenth century and followed the agreement reached with Rome after drawn-out negotiations, validated by the 1596 concordat.⁸ In the second half of the seventeenth century preventive censorship was based around dual control by the Sant'Uffizio – appointed to pronounce on how much texts complied with the Catholic canon – and the government, which intervened through the Riformatori dello Studio di Padova to certify that books did not put forward any ideas that could upset the social and political order.⁹ Unsurprisingly, the surveillance procedure was no match for a lively publishing market like the one in Venice: thanks to the enterprise of printers, volumes already included or on the way to being included in the *Index* continued to be issued in fairly large quantities and the government sometimes turned a blind eye.¹⁰ In 1690 the

⁸ See Paolo Ulvioni, 'Stampa e censura a Venezia nel Seicento', *Archivio Veneto*, 106 (1975): 45–99 and Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press*.

⁹ Matters relating to Venetian book censorship are extremely complex and intersect with the problems connected to the Republic's jurisdictional policy. For a primer, see Ulvioni, 'Stampa e censura a Venezia nel Seicento'; Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press*; Infelise, 'A proposito di imprimatur', and more generally, *I libri proibiti da Gutenberg all'Encyclopédie* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1999). On the clandestine book market in Venice, see Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli*, in particular Chapter III. Here there are only a few allusions to certain questions regarding the circulation of texts featuring heresy or unbelief.

¹⁰ In this sense the main expedient was the false printing date. This technique was especially frequent for avoiding religious prohibitions and was often used in accordance with the government, which did not grant the necessary permits for a work but authorized it to be printed as long as it was shown to have outside origins. This was a widespread practice, aimed at both giving financial support to an important branch of the city's economy put in difficulty by excessively strict censorship and circulating messages for which the Republic could not assume open responsibility, thereby displaying at least token respect for habitual practices. Through this method all the most daring works of the Incogniti could come out in Venice: the complete works by Loredan, Pietro Michiel, Ferrante Pallavicino, Maiolino Bisaccioni and many others, an output 'widely available in the catalogues of various printers and booksellers in those years: Cristoforo Tomasini, Giacomo Scaglia, their heirs Gueriglio, Andrea Baba, Pietro Bertano and even, in great quantities, in those of Pinelli the ducal printer': Mario Infelise, 'Ex ignoto notus? Note sul tipografo Sarzina e l'Accademia degli Incogniti', in *Libri tipografi biblioteche. Ricerche storiche dedicate a Luigi Balsamo* (Florence: Olschki, 1997). According to a Secretary of the Riformatori in the mid-seventeenth century, 'innumerable' volumes had been published without a licence from the Inquisition, quoted in Marino Zorzi, 'La produzione e la circolazione del libro', in Gino Benzoni and Gaetano Cozzi (eds), *Storia di Venezia* (7 vols, Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1997), vol. 7, pp. 921–85, at p. 955. The ecclesiastical jurisdiction was not, however, alone in suffering the consequences of the printers' initiative. In 1655 Giovanni Maria Turrini, who was also

Inquisitor Tommaso Rovetta complained to the Sant'Uffizio in Rome that 'here in Venice printers have little fear of the Inquisitor',¹¹ and returned to the concept in another letter, in which he wrote disconsolately that it was not surprising that more printed books were in circulation as a result of government approval than those approved by imprimaturs from the Inquisition, given that 'these gentlemen can punish deviant printers, while the Inquisitors cannot'.¹²

renowned for being a lapsed Christian and for not fearing divine punishment, managed to publish a book in full, even though the Secretary of the Riformatori had censored certain parts. The work in question was *De stylo datariae* by Dyrk Ameyden. It seems to have been done with a certain impertinence which betrays substantial familiarity with the system. Indeed, according to one of his chief composers, he was 'accustomed to printing prohibited books, and whatever he likes'. His employee's words were in some way justified as Turrini was one of closest printers to the field of the Incogniti and at various times Ferrante Pallavicino's editor. He used a series of fairly widespread techniques. He sometimes printed with a false date in Amsterdam, as in the case of *Staffilate del cavalier Stigliani or Mercurio e Caronte*, or, as in the case of *Le decisioni della Rota romana* by Clemente Merlino, he printed a booklet with the censored parts, entitling it 'Decisiones omissae in editione veneta Clementis Merlini con una finta impressione che dice Augustae Taurinorum apud Franciscum Ferrofinum': ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 638, denunciation by Zuanne Cartari, dated Rome 10 July 1655, found in the denunciation box on 3 August. In the eighteenth century the expedient of a false date became habitual. On false indications, see, for example, Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime*; Brigitte Moreau, 'Contrefaçon et clandestinité à Paris au début de la Réforme: les premières 'fausses adresse'', in François Moureau (ed.), *Les presses grises. La contrefaçon du livre (XVI–XIX siècles)* (Paris: Aux amateurs des livres, 1988), pp. 41–53; Jean-Dominique Mellot, 'Per una valutazione dei falsi indirizzi: la testimonianza delle edizioni con permesso tacito in Francia', in Maria G. Tavoni and Françoise Waquet (eds), *Lo spazio del libro nell'Europa del XVIII secolo* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1997), pp. 251–75; there is a precise consideration of the Venetian case in Infelise, *L'editoria veneziana nel '700* and id., 'Introduzione', in *False date. Repertorio delle licenze di stampa veneziane con falso luogo di edizione (1740–1797)*, Patrizia Bravetti and Orfea Granzotto (eds) (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2008).

¹¹ ACDF, *St. St.*, O 2–g, letter which is undated, but from 1690.

¹² Ibid., letter of 25 November 1690. Rovetta's letters need to be placed within the red-hot climate created by the *imprimatur* controversy. In Venice the Inquisitor only had to issue one authorization to certify that the text complied with Catholic principles. The secular power was responsible for granting the actual printing licence. In 1656, however, in the middle of the War of Candia, as I have previously suggested, the Riformatori dello Studio di Padova implicitly recognized the Inquisitor's right to issue this licence, thereby putting the lay and Church authorities on the same level. In 1688 the Senate returned to the agreed norms, not without raising protests from Rome and the Venetian Inquisitor, who abstained from granting the printing authorization for a long time. The matter was only resolved in 1696 substantially in favour of the Venetian cause. The episode is reconstructed in Infelise, 'A proposito di imprimatur'.

In tandem with the revival in jurisdictional politics towards the end of the seventeenth century, the margins of freedom granted to the clandestine market seemed to be widening. The city certainly rapidly recovered its role after overcoming the publishing crisis that characterized the 1630s and 1640s. Unregistered presses which could not be controlled by the guild of printers and booksellers or the censor did the rest: in 1681, for example, an insistent rumour went around that Sagredo, a procurator, was preparing to print the works of Maimbourg privately.¹³ Ambassadors and *residenti* also played their part, as they had begun to adopt publication in a systematic way as an essential weapon in the political struggle at the beginning of the seventeenth century. It was common knowledge that battles were also conducted using newspapers, gazettes, pamphlets and other kinds of publication as weapons.¹⁴ Nobody was surprised in 1633 when it became known that satirical works against the pope were printed in the Spanish Embassy and that at the same time something similar was about to be done in the Nunciature against the Venetians, a partial rewriting of a copy of *Oratio in venetos* procured by the Austrian ambassador.¹⁵

¹³ ASVat, *Segreteria di Stato*, Venezia, b. 123, c. 21v, letter of 15 March 1681. The Nunzio was urged to intervene, with the help of the Inquisitor and ideally the Patriarch.

¹⁴ For an example regarding such aspects of political struggle in Venice, see Filippo de Vivo, 'Le armi dell'ambasciatore. Voci e manoscritti a Parigi durante l'Interdetto di Venezia', in Lucia Strappini (ed.), *I luoghi dell'immaginario barocco. Atti del convegno di Siena, 21–23 ottobre 1999* (Naples: Liguori, 2001), pp. 189–201 and, at greater length, Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)

¹⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 628, report by Don Agostino Rossi on 19 October 1633. In addition to the clandestine printing that took place inside embassies, diplomats played a fairly marked role in the distribution of prohibited material. It was usual to issue manuscripts from embassies, which then found a way to be distributed. In 1668 the French ambassador farmed out a copy of a satirical book to Servite prior Fra' Bernardo Fantin, who then subcontracted it immediately to a professed member of the convent: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 617, undated report by Fra' Ottavio Monza but dating back to 1668. If there was no official authorization, other books probably came out of the Spanish Embassy at night in 1697, so that they could be copied and put back in place the morning after. Taking account of the fact that they ended up in the hands of Pasquale Biondi, a writer who was also a gazetteer by profession, we can imagine that the level of distribution was fairly broad: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 591, report by Lodovico Francesco Cremona on 19 March 1697. Embassy libraries therefore found a way to distribute books as they were not subject to any censorship. In particular, ambassadors could receive books from outside without any checks at customs and then sell them, or dedicate themselves to collection work in the city. In 1709 the Savoy agent managed to procure one of Sarpi's manuscripts 'of more than two hundred sheets, which explains the reasons adopted when he wrote against the edict issued and well known against the court in Rome', so that he could publish another similar one explaining

A wide range of texts were printed in the city, but the demand was much greater. After all, although clandestine printing was a business for those that undertook it, it could still be problematic in the event of indepth investigations, and the preventive censorship system was structured to stamp out production at its root. As a result, those who handled this kind of material were sometimes forced to fall back on alternative channels and output. It was not an insurmountable problem up to a point, as books like *Don Quixote*, the works of Fulvio Testi, Boileau, Bacon or *La secchia rapita* by Tassoni could enter from abroad with public approval. In 1699, for example, Leti's *Teatro Gallico*, Gassendi's *Philosophia Epicurei* and the works of Lucretius arrived from Livorno.¹⁶ However, in order to attract customers, booksellers needed to be able to count on as wide a range of clandestine works as possible, or at the very least they needed to make it known that procuring a prohibited book was not an insurmountable obstacle. Booksellers generally acted in such a way that in the Venetian market it was always possible to procure works that were difficult or impossible to find elsewhere in Italy, as the international contact networks that many of them developed allowed them to handle orders which were often dangerous. From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, despite the pressure of censorship, the work of people like Stefano Combi or families like the Hertzs, organizers of large-scale European book trading networks, facilitated the entry into the city of volumes and ideas which were often unpopular with the Church of Rome and sometimes even with the Republic itself, which was even riskier.¹⁷ Combi worked with de la Noue, a Dutchman, and thanks to the incessant work of an agent like Andries Fries he imported and exported books to and from Holland and Swiss and German territories.¹⁸

the Duke's reasons on the matter of religious politics: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 601, report by Bernardino Garbinati on 5 February 1709.

¹⁶ ASV, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, b. 372, note about books in transit through customs on 9 April 1699.

¹⁷ For example, it was well known that Venice was a favoured transit point for books arriving from Holland. In May 1663 Borde and Arnaud, two booksellers from Lyon, replied to Magliabechi that 'as far as books from Holland are concerned, note that some booksellers in Venice can obtain them more easily than we can, given that we send for them by land with high transportation costs, while from Holland they can always travel by sea with low expenses': Salvatore Ussia, *Carteggio Magliabechi. Lettere di Borde, Arnaud e associati lionesi ad Antonio Magliabechi (1661–1700)* (Florence: Olschki, 1980), p. 57, letter of 31 May 1663.

¹⁸ On the highly important work of Combi and La Noue, and crucial contact with Antonio Magliabechi, see Alfonso Mirto, *Stampatori, editori, librai nella seconda metà del Seicento, parte prima* (Florence: Centro Editoriale Toscano, 1989) and *Stampatori, editori, librai nella seconda metà del Seicento, parte seconda. I grandi fornitori di Antonio Magliabechi e*

Giovanni Giacomo Hertz – and later his son Giovanni Gabriele, who printed the *Giornale de' letterati d'Italia* – showed himself to be extremely open to the European scale of trading, but was also firmly established in business networks in the city and had a clear preference for imports. In this way his bookshop soon became one of the best supplied in the city – and remained so for a good 50 years – as well as perhaps the most important, a centre for discussions and supplies of works which were not always orthodox. As Apostolo Zeno testified in 1708, a man who probably knew the Venetian market better than anyone else, all the latest works on the market could be bought there.¹⁹ Boyle's *Works* in Latin, Machiavelli's *Discours politiques*, Boccaccio's *Contes et nouvelles*, Simon's *Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* and some works by Maimbourg all figure in a 1721 inventory and show that Venetians had access to important debates and works that were mainstays of religious dissent and European culture.²⁰

della corte medicea (Florence: Centro Editoriale Toscano, 1994). Useful for reconstructing the international book trading networks is *Pieter Blaeu: lettere ai fiorentini. Antonio Magliabechi, Leopoldo e Cosimo III de' Medici, e altri 1660–1705*, A. Mirto and H. Th. Van Veen (eds) (Florence: Istituto universitario olandese di storia dell'arte, 1993). See also *Lettere dal Regno ad Antonio Magliabechi*, A. Quondam and M. Rak (eds) (2 vols, Naples: Guida, 1978).

¹⁹ On the Hertz family see Barbierato, 'Giovanni Giacomo Hertz', Parts I and II, and the bibliography therein.

²⁰ ASV, *Giudici di petizion*, b. 417 [82], inventory 22, 23 April 1721. There is analysis of the inventory, which included about 12,000 titles in tens of thousands of volumes, in Paolo Ulvioni, 'Stampatori e librai a Venezia nel Seicento', *Archivio Veneto*, 114 (1977): 93–124, in particular pp. 119–20. In this way Hertz managed to build up a vast clientele 'mainly made up of scholars, patricians and men of science who could find a wide up-to-date range of texts in his shop intended for study, from philosophical and medical treatises to works of natural science and texts on the spread of the Reformation in Europe': Infelise, *L'editoria veneziana nel '700*, p. 29. Books reached him from German and French-speaking areas above all, just like many of his customers in Venice. His work as a cultural mediator extended to offering hospitality to Leibniz during his stay in Venice. The German philosopher's circle of friends met in the bookshop, which was also used as the postal address for his correspondence: Andre Robinet, *G.W. Leibniz Iter Italicum (mars 1689–mars 1690)* (Florence: Olschki, 1988), p. 418. There are some interesting considerations in Brendan Dooley, *Science, Politics and Society in Eighteenth-Century Italy. The 'Giornale de' letterati d'Italia' and its World* (New York and London: Garland, 1991), pp. 50–53. A large number of booksellers were able to maintain contact with the European world. Among these I will just mention Domenico Lovisa, who combined his ordinary work as a bookseller and printer with a good knowledge of books at the margins of orthodoxy, in particular those of a scientific nature. In 1716 he managed to open a second *bottega* in San Cassiano in addition to his original one near the Rialto, a bookshop which the editor of the *Pallade veneta* judged to be 'very well stocked with books on every scientific and literary subject': *Pallade veneta*, from Saturday 29 August to Saturday 5 September 1716. The manuscript copy is difficult to find, so I will supply the archive reference: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 713, *Pallade veneta* file.

The first step to take in order to procure a prohibited book was therefore to go to a bookshop with a reputation for being well stocked.²¹ Especially under certain circumstances, such as those following the trial against Valvasense the bookseller at the end of the 1640s, bibliopoles usually exerted caution in displaying compromising volumes. Some like Bernardone, who we have already encountered, kept them under the counter or in hidden semi-official warehouses, normally close to their *botteghe*,²² while others paid little attention to the potential dangers and put even fairly dangerous books on display. Even in the unpleasant event of a search it was always possible to plead ignorance. This excuse could only be used up to a point, however, as booksellers had to have at least a rudimentary knowledge of prohibited works: from 1671 the entrance exam for the Guild required knowledge of the 'main prohibited books in order to keep away from them'.²³ However, considering the huge increase in books included in the *Index*, one could quite reasonably claim that it was objectively difficult to keep up with developments, and in any case searches were still a fairly remote possibility.²⁴ Even in the worst case scenario, booksellers and printers could fall back on a surprising level of protection if necessary thanks to consolidated relations established through book trading, especially in the clandestine field. In this way, when Paolo de Paoli was banished by the Esecutori alla Bestemmia in 1707, he stayed on in Venice in relative comfort as a guest at the Frari convent in the cell of his important influential friend, Fra' Vincenzo Coronelli.²⁵

²¹ Analysing the trials kept in the archive of the Sant'Uffizio in Udine, Enzo Kermol concluded that 'most of the books were acquired directly in the places where they were printed, especially in Venice': Kermol, *La rete di Vulcano*, p. 15. See the case of a Venetian bookseller of forbidden books in Federico Barbierato, '*La rovina di Venetia in materia de' libri prohibiti. Il libraio Salvatore de' Negri e l'Inquisizione veneziana (1628–1661)*' (Venice: Marsilio, 2007).

²² ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 3 March 1685.

²³ ASV, *Arti, Stampatori e librai*, b. 164, fasc. V, c. 86v, 6 January 1671.

²⁴ 'In Venice they don't usually visit bookshops or seize prohibited books, but they give superficial orders about it': ASTO, *Materie politiche per rapporto all'interno. Lettere di particolari*, letter b, batch 128, letters by Girolamo Brusoni, 17 December 1676.

²⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 601, report by Bernardino Garbinati on 10 November 1707. On Vincenzo Coronelli, see Augusto de Ferrari, *ad vocem*, in *DBI*; Antonella Barzazi, 'Enciclopedismo e ordini religiosi tra sei e Settecento: la Biblioteca universale di Vincenzo Coronelli', *Studi settecenteschi*, 16 (1996): 61–83, and *Gli affanni dell'erudizione*, pp. 52–5 and 59–60. On his journalism work as an illustrator of war newsletters and gazettes, especially in connection with Girolamo Albrizzi, see Dooley, *The Social History of Skepticism*, pp. 63–4, and Infelise, *Prima dei giornali*.

All in all, the field was a dynamic one and it was not very difficult to procure heterodox material in printed or handwritten form.²⁶ Even outside Venice people knew that they could find what they were looking for; in 1656 Giovan Battista Gherin claimed that many heretics themselves stocked up on prohibited material: ‘bad books against the Catholic religion and the Supreme Pontiff’, which they found in *botteghe* or procured from private copyists.²⁷ A few years before in 1653, Andrea Colonna, a nobleman from Udine, pointed out to the Inquisitor in his city that libertine works such as *La rete di Vulcano* or *La pudicizia schernita*, along with many other heterodox texts, ‘are sold publicly by every bookseller, both the main ones and the stallholders that sell from their stalls on feast days’.²⁸ In this respect it is quite significant that in 1710 Giovan Battista Recurtti from the ‘Alla Religione’ bookshop felt the need to publish an announcement to remind people of the opening at the Ponte dei Baretteri of ‘a new bookshop with a good range of unusual selected volumes, which by displaying Religion on its sign shows that the bookseller does not want to allow those volumes which stink of hell in his shop’. The need to specify this demonstrated the fact that people expected to find prohibited titles in many other shops.²⁹ Indeed, apart from this scrupulous temperate bookseller, many of his colleagues in the market proved to be less sensitive to the hazards of such

²⁶ Even stallholders and peddlers in Venice collected books, which they then sold elsewhere. There is an example in ACDF, *St. St.*, O 2-m, spontaneous appearance at the Sant’Uffizio in Rome by Girolamo Rinaldi, a doctor from Ferrara, on 12 April 1650, c. 41r. The frequent benevolent tolerance of prohibited books and their readers was also well known. While on the one hand this was good for business, on the other hand it also affected those who had had censorship problems. According to Muratori, obtaining reading licences in the Republic was too easy: ‘With regard to reading prohibited books without a licence, I know that the feelings in the dominion of the Venetian Republic are different from the rest of Italy; but I don’t know how well founded the liberty that they take is. There are many books which are not prohibited by Rome but are prohibited by nature and religion, because they can damage good morals and the honest beliefs of us Catholics. How can the freedom to read anything at random be extended so much?’: Muratori, *Epistolario*, vol. 7, p. 2849, letter n. 2835 to Francesco Brembate in Bergamo, dated Modena, 2 June 1729. On the attitude of the Venetian authorities, see the writings of Franciscan Carlo Lodoli, revisor from 1723 to 1742 and from 1726 responsible for customs surveillance, and his attempts to make censorship less rigid and more sensitive to the financial considerations of publishing: Lodoli, *Sulla censura dei libri*.

²⁷ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 108, trial against Bartolomeo Moro, deposition by Giovan Battista Gherin on 27 June 1656.

²⁸ Kermol, *La rete di Vulcano*, trial 244, spontaneous appearance on 10 April 1653, p. 137.

²⁹ *Pallade veneta, da sabato 20 a sabato 27 dicembre 1710*, in ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 713.

trading for the soul. These hell-infused volumes could also be procured fairly easily not only from booksellers but also from *bottega* assistants or anyone with connections to *botteghe*. In 1651 a certain Baroncino, the estate manager of the well-known bookseller Combi, distributed a handwritten version of *La statera de' purganti*, as well as *Parlatoio delle monache*, *Anima di Ferrante Pallavicino* and *Divorzio celeste* printed with a false date in Lyon.³⁰ A few years later in 1680, while working in bookseller Francesco's *bottega* in Santa Maria del Giglio, Giovanni Zanoni, a carpenter, found:

an octavo pamphlet, two fingers thick, bound well in parchment, and I started to read it out of curiosity. I saw that it was about the religion of the Dutch, and said things against our Christian doctrine. I asked the afore-mentioned Francesco to lend it to me. He agreed and I took it home with me.³¹

A few decades later in 1719 when Fabrizio Fagagni, a nobleman from Rimini, was in Venice for the Carnival, it was probably the young bookseller and printer Giovan Battista Albrizzi who offered him *L'anima di Ferrante Pallavicino*, a work 'which he kept on public display in his bookshop'.³²

While booksellers continued to be at the centre of the widespread circulation of prohibited texts, other figures not necessarily professionally connected to the publishing world operated in the background and played an important role in terms of distribution. In 1677 volumes from Amsterdam were sold in a haberdasher's, 'all'insegna del Drago',³³ and in 1750 in a coffee *bottega* in Spadaria it was possible to buy a copy of *Dialogo galante ed erudito*, which worried the Riformatori somewhat.³⁴ Therefore, when Teresa Rizzi started selling books from her house in Sant'Angelo in 1781 – 'she was a good catch and now studies music' – it was nothing particularly new at the time, but rather the continuation of a widespread tradition: she sold French books 'with figures that show sensual outpourings, with sodomy and the like, which go against religion'.

³⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 106, trial against Bartolomeo Batocchi, spontaneous appearance by Bartolomeo on 4 April and deposition on 9 May 1651.

³¹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 151, *Miscellanea processi* file, spontaneous appearance by Giovanni Zanoni on 17 December 1680.

³² ACDF, *St. St.*, O 2-m, letter from the Inquisitor of Rimini on 29 November 1719 and copy of the deposition by Fabrizio Fagagni, cc. 8r–10v. He also borrowed 'the Macchiavello' from a certain Cosimo Peccatori in Venice.

³³ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, report by Onorato Castelnovo on 11 September 1677.

³⁴ ASV, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, b. 366, trial for the distribution of the book in question, deposition by Girolamo Zanetti on 7 October 1750.

She conducted business by receiving customers on appointment.³⁵ The sale of prohibited manuscripts by hairdresser Antonio Santello from his *bottega* in 1785 was nothing new either.³⁶

Booksellers – or others operating in the book sector – were hard-pressed to satisfy the needs of the diverse, open-minded clientele in Venice on their own, as were those unofficially publicly recognized as sellers.³⁷ Recourse to the underground market and private trade and lending networks therefore constituted a supplementary part of the consumption of heterodox written texts. A plethora of books, pamphlets and papers managed to enter the city despite the Inquisitors' concerns, and once there they were distributed in a way which was sometimes not even particularly underground. There was no way that the Sant'Uffizio could control books that arrived via unforeseeable channels, in the luggage of noblemen or ambassadors or in the pockets of travellers and merchants. For example, after having travelled across half of Europe, Calvin's *Catechism* arrived in Venice in the 1670s in the possession of the Carmelite friar Elia Borghi. It was a book:

like a compendium, small, bound like a little service book, I think it was covered in black if I am not mistaken. I kept it in a chest in Ferrara, and I got that book from a man from Piedmont in a country osteria in the State of Milan. As this man was a wayfarer and did not have any money, he said that he had a book and that he would sell it. He showed it to me, I read the title and I bought it for six soldi.

The volume in question was 'cuius titulus est Sessanta salmi di David tradotti in rime volgari italiane, secondo la verità del testo hebreo, col Cantico di Simeone [sic], et i dieci comandamenti della Legge', but really contained 'The catechism, that is a Formulary for educating and teaching children about the true pure Christian doctrine'.³⁸ Arrivals of this kind were a daily occurrence and were combined with material which travelled through the normal postal system. Michelangelo Fardella made use of a young man from Geneva who sent him books that were difficult to find from his homeland. He immediately put them back on to the market through lending and trade networks,³⁹ but it was usual to use private correspondence for prohibited material.

³⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 611, report by Girolamo Lioni on 9 March 1781.

³⁶ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 611, report by Girolamo Lioni on 26 October 1785.

³⁷ Ulvioni, 'Stampa e censura a Venezia nel Seicento', p. 68.

³⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, 125, trial against Fra' Elia Borghi, declaration on 27 November 1687.

³⁹ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, trial against Fra' Michelangelo Fardella, spontaneous appearance by Don Filippo Caminetti on 28 April 1689. With regard to Geneva, Caminetti

Interest in the outside world and the constant flow of works from abroad were clearly the direct consequence of attempts to block the circulation of books and ideas in Italian territories. Even though perceptions were somewhat confused, people realized that the most important new works were printed on the other side of the Alps, especially in France, a country where circulation was more free and was not subject to overly thorough ecclesiastical control.⁴⁰ An ecstatic nobleman in fancy dress told the French ambassador's wife in 1685 that 'France is heaven on earth',⁴¹ and in 1689 during a conversation with Don Filippo Caminetti, our old acquaintance Michelangelo Fardella regretted that the former could not speak French and therefore could not read many books which he would have been happy to lend him.⁴² Similarly, while strolling around St Mark's Square in 1730, the painter Sebastiano Ricci invited his pupil and colleague Felice Petricini, a devout reader, to approach 'good authors', although it was necessary to speak French to do so. He said that he had quite a few of them and that he would be happy to lend them.⁴³

Prohibited material mainly tended to circulate thanks to secret loans or transactions that involved trading or real payments. By 1674 Francesco Cranebitter had built up his library of prohibited works gradually in this way, buying from private sellers – especially clerics – at home or in the street:⁴⁴ in addition to the omnipresent occult texts, he had also managed to procure *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola* by Antonio Rocco and *La rettorica delle puttane* by Ferrante Pallavicino.⁴⁵ After all, contacts and readings – which produced

said 'it praised Calvin and his saintliness', claiming that the things Catholic doctors wrote against him were all false.

⁴⁰ There is a lot of information and ideas on this aspect of the issue in Françoise Waquet, *Le modèle française et l'Italie savante. Conscience de soi et perception de l'autre dans la République des lettres (1660–1750)* (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1989). See also the classic work by Maugain, *Etude sur l'évolution intellectuelle de l'Italie*.

⁴¹ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 547, report by Camillo Badoer on 10 July 1685.

⁴² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, trial against Fra' Michelangelo Fardella, spontaneous appearance by Don Filippo Caminetti on 28 April 1689.

⁴³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 140, trial against Abbot Cerutti, spontaneous appearance by Felice Petricini on 6 July 1730. For more information on the turbulent life of Sebastiano Ricci, also from a religious point of view, see Lino Moretti, 'Documenti e appunti su Sebastiano Ricci', *Saggi e Memorie di Storia dell'Arte*, 11 (1978): 97–125. There are some up-to-date considerations in Federico Montecuccoli degli Erri, 'Sebastiano Ricci e la sua famiglia. Nuove pagine di vita privata', *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 153 (1994–1995): 105–54.

⁴⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 117, trial against Francesco Cranebitter, deposition on 18 December 1674.

⁴⁵ Ibid., note enclosed with Cranebitter's deposition on 18 December 1674.

the need to acquire copies or procure transcriptions – could also come about casually. The result was that trading was an extremely easy and immediate process. In 1674 Antonio Zucco, a soldier boarding at the house of 19-year-old painter Teodoro Paganin, lent the youngster one of his books. He saw him reading it and so naturally deduced that he wanted ‘curious books’. As it was Paganin who reported the episode to the Inquisitor, it is debatable whether the offer really did precede the request. In any case the painter played his part; when the soldier did not follow up his offer, he opened the trunk where he kept his things and took out two manuscripts. While leafing through one of them, he found ‘some propositions against the sacraments of the Church, which were not good, and that the Holy Virgin was not chaste, and that you don’t have to account to anyone after death, that there is no such thing as purgatory or the house of the devil, but that it is in this world’. After seeing what the first manuscript was like, he said, he was not brave enough to open the second.⁴⁶

Issues that people claimed to have read about in books could also arouse the curiosity of those directly involved in discussions or onlookers, persuading them of the need to undertake the same reading themselves. Considering the characteristics of the audience, the extent of the demand and the frequency of heterodox discourses, there were as many opportunities for handovers, loans and buying and selling in private houses as in public places, where individual transactions were sometimes a necessary supplement to discussions. Indeed, it was not rare for written material to be part of a dispute as well as a means of spreading ideas: books and papers accompanied discussions and were shown as evidence or presented as tools which conferred authority on the arguments set forth. During an altercation ‘about certain opinions of doctors’ in 1689, the deacon of Concordia, Pietro Fontana, made a strong appeal for a book to be brought in order to help him to prove that he was right.⁴⁷ Similarly, in 1715 Don

⁴⁶ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 119, trial against Giovanni Zucco, spontaneous appearance by Teodoro Paganin on 16 June 1676.

⁴⁷ The episode ended in a somewhat obscure way. The deacon was lying ill in bed and was arguing with Giovanni Andrea Diana, the patriarchal auditor, and a Servite friar called Vigevani, in the presence of another cleric, Andrea Martinelli. At a certain point, ‘wanting to sustain his beliefs, he gave a key to a chest that was in his room – while they were arguing down in the mezzanine – to Father Andrea Martinelli so that he could go and fetch a book that was in the chest. He went off, opened the chest and, after laying his hand on a book, he felt that the book was moving. Astonished, he was gripped by fear, so he closed the chest and went downstairs all confused and pale without the book. On seeing him, the deacon asked him what the matter was, took the key and said to him: I understand, I understand, you cretin. You were afraid, let me do it, for God’s sake, I’ll go and get the book. I’m not afraid. And he said to Father Andrea: ah listen, listen, was the book sliding about? Ah, you cretin, they don’t know you. I’ll go up, leave it to me, as I’m not afraid. So he went upstairs, got the book

Camillo Giacomuzzi, a millenarian, took manuscripts out of a leather folder that he always carried with him and read them or had them read out to support his reasoning.⁴⁸

Beyond individual cases it was clear that discussions gave rise to curiosity and stimuli that created the need to procure books and texts. Exchanges between individuals, disputes and public or semi-public displays of heterodoxy created a climate which favoured the handover of different types of written material, among which the role played by manuscripts should not be underestimated. It was a form of communication which lent itself well to evading controls and ably satisfying the needs of readers who showed curiosity towards a whole work or part of one.⁴⁹ Reasons related to censorship and practical opportunities were clearly contributing factors to the establishment of an underground market in hand-copied heterodox texts as one of the most distinctive elements of the circulation of prohibited material up to the late eighteenth century, not only

and came back down': ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 125, trial against Don Pietro Alvisi Fontana, deposition by Don Fabiano Fabiani on 12 May 1689 at the Sant'Uffizio in Concordia, sent in duplicate to the Venetian office. Moreover, relations between Father Fontana and Venice were very close. In 1678 he was one of the most assiduous habitués of groups of noblemen with intrigue-related interests, a friend of various senators and in particular the ambassador in Rome. He could be seen every day at the gates of the Palace trying to collect information: ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 566, report by Onorato Castelnovo on 1 September 1678.

⁴⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 136, trial against Don Camillo Giacomuzzi, deposition by Fra' Andrea Spreafighi on 23 July 1715. In 1780 Giacomo Pascolin, who worked in bookseller Marcantonio Manfrè's *bottega*, explained to his colleague Francesco Giobbe, in a clearly ironic way, that Giobbe (Job) was not as patient as they said, because Scripture represented him in a very different way. Pascolin asserted his right to interpret Scripture as he wished: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 150, Giacomo Pascolin file, trial against Giacomo Pascolin, spontaneous appearance by Francesco Giobbe on 15 February 1780.

⁴⁹ On manuscript production, see Armando Petrucci, 'Introduzione', in Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin (eds), *La nascita del libro* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1992); Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), which mentioned a handwritten publication; Henry R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts 1558–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); François Moureau (ed.), *De bonne main. La communication manuscrite au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris and Oxford: Universitas–Voltaire Foundation, 1993); David McKitterick, *Print, Manuscript and the Search for Order, 1450–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); David D. Hall, *Ways of Writing. The Practice and Politics of Text-Making in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Brian Richardson, *Manuscript Culture in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). On the situation in Venice, see Barbierato, *Nella stanza dei circoli*, pp. 237–303 and De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice*.

in the Republic.⁵⁰ For example, there was an upsurge in handwritten libertine literature from the middle of the century onwards when it temporarily became more difficult to print the works of the Incogniti following the trial which involved Valvasense the bookseller and other colleagues of his who had often used their presses to publish books by Loredan's group.⁵¹ While many printed copies continued to be circulated widely as a result of the large number of previous printing runs, they were joined by a huge quantity of manuscripts sold in bookshops or other *botteghe*, houses or inns, forming a market which often intersected with the printed book field.

The host of readers who became transcribers also formed an extremely varied group. Copying was sometimes a private operation, whereby an individual obtained a copy of the text he was interested in by using personal methods. More often, however, the results of this work could be seen outside the domestic environment: new copies could be distributed through loans – sometimes upon payment and thus a form of rental, but more often free of charge and spontaneous – where their new owners could duplicate them again, or as the central element in a trading system.⁵² In this way texts borrowed from public or monastic libraries could end up in other libraries thanks to patient clandestine copying work. The popularity of these manuscripts led to an even larger readership and new copyists. As we will see, it was in this way that substantial extracts were copied from works by Bayle and Spinoza kept in the private libraries of the Bortolo Zorzi the hatter and the noble Pisani di Santo Stefano family in the 1730s and then distributed. Even at the end of the eighteenth century, when the nobleman Taddeo Badoer from San Samuel procured a printed copy of 'secretary Gratarol's

⁵⁰ In addition to the common reason that handwritten output could clearly not be subjected to preventive censorship, there was the fact that at least in Venice manuscripts generally had an ambiguous status as items for censorship for a long time. On the whole it was always stated fairly forcefully that the Sant'Uffizio should not interfere in matters regarding manuscripts, which were not to be considered prohibited books. See, as an example, ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 15, consultation by Fra' Giovanni Maria Bertolli and Fra' Celso Viccioni on 20 January 1690 and ACDF, *St. St.*, O 2–h, letter from the Venetian Inquisitor Tommaso Gennari to Congregazione on 24 March 1725, c. 46r.

⁵¹ On the Valvasense trial see Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini* and Ulvioni, 'Stampa e censura a Venezia nel Seicento'.

⁵² This was obviously also the case for original output: between the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century, the previously mentioned Antonio Partenio used to compose satire against dead pontiffs, the conclave in general and cardinals one by one on the occasion of 'sedia vacante'. He wrote them for a *bottega* assistant who paid him and then sold them: ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 132, trial 'of 5 March', deposition by Antonio Partenio on 8 April 1705, c. 9r bis.

book',⁵³ he equipped his kitchen as a copying centre and made handwritten copies which he sold at four *zecchini* each.⁵⁴

It was difficult, if not impossible, for the authorities to monitor a system which had such a non-institutionalized character and lacked nerve centres to subject to direct surveillance. There were clear guarantees of safety in this extensive fragmented structure completely devoid of coordination, as well as numerous advantages, also in view of the smaller number of copies which could be reproduced in a given period of time. The opportunity to select extracts or elements deemed to be interesting in themselves from within a text for a chosen reader or someone who had commissioned a copy meant that new texts were distributed. For example, Francesco Torelli took songs and images from Aretino's works in the 1630s and made many copies of them which were still in circulation 20 years later. A servant from Ca' Querini procured the originals for him by stealing them from his master's library at night.⁵⁵ There was also the document that Don Camillo Giacomuzzi used to demonstrate the mortality of the soul in the early eighteenth century.⁵⁶ However, quite frequently such compilations

⁵³ *Narrazione apologetica di Pietro Antonio Gratarol nobile padovano* (Stockholm: Presso Enrico Fougat cavaliere del real ordine di Wasa, 1779) was a huge success all over Europe, especially in Masonic lodges and other places connected to them. It was distributed clandestinely in Venice, especially in manuscript form, and was highly sought-after. There is a handwritten copy in ASV, *Miscellanea atti diversi-Manoscritti*, b. 67. Gratarol, Secretary of the Senate, was the founder of the Union Masonic lodge, established on 27 November 1772, and the long-term holder of the position of Venerable Master. The role of Secretary of the Senate had special importance in the Venetian government and was thus incompatible with Masonic membership. Forced to flee Venice, thanks to considerable protection associated with Masonic militancy, he was able to stay first with Duke Ferdinand of Brunswick and then with Frederick Adolf of Sweden. In the meantime in Venice he was sentenced to death in his absence. After spending time in England, Portugal and the United States, he was assassinated in Madagascar in 1785: Michela Dal Borgo, *ad vocem*, in *DBI*; Rodolfo Gallo, 'La libera muratoria a Venezia nel Settecento', *Archivio Veneto*, 60–61 (1957): 35–78 and Carlo Francovich, *Storia della massoneria in Italia. Dalle origini alla Rivoluzione francese* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1974), pp. 262–6.

⁵⁴ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 611, report by Girolamo Lioni on 26 October 1785. To compare prices, at more or less the same time Bayle's *Works* fetched a clandestine price of 80 ducats. They were supplied by bookseller Felice Lazzaroni, helped by the keeper of the public bookshop, Gaetano Pasetti. The latter paid attention to conversations and possible wishes expressed by users and told them that they could find what they were looking for at Lazzaroni's bookshop: *ibid.*, report on 10 March 1787.

⁵⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 105, Francesco Torelli file, spontaneous appearance by Francesco on 14 August 1650.

⁵⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 136, trial against Camillo Giacomuzzi, spontaneous appearance by Pietro Curti on 6 July 1713.

were only partly based on other texts: conversations or thoughts overheard in some way were selected and codified for private or public use. In this respect there was a constant aspect of fusion; take, for example, the ‘heretical collections drawn from the sermons of the Jesuits, *Doppia impiccata* and Machiavelli’⁵⁷ compiled by Don Giovanni Lapi in around 1678, ‘containing details against the Church’, distributed and read by the author in the ‘del pomo d’argento’ *spezieria* in Calle degli Stagneri.⁵⁸ Manuscripts tapped into the dynamism and originality of different cultures, providing public discussions with an unclassifiable number of documents which tended to spread and fill gaps left by censorship, bypassing it to bring ideas or fragments of ideas, stories or teachings to a huge audience. The result was an original and in some way subversive blend of speech and writing: the word – that of Jesuit preaching in the previous example – was added to a written support and mixed with Machiavelli, reinterpreting it in a heretical way and distributing it further through public readings and by making new copies. Transcriptions of teachings, sermons, discourses and reasoning deemed to be particularly effective and therefore immortalized in writing circulated widely and gave the words of heterodoxy a different dimension.

This was at least partly the result of a fairly high level of literacy and the solid presence of cultural intermediaries able to stimulate different impulses. In general the extensive network for spreading and distributing prohibited material mirrored and was the direct consequence of certain key features of the Venetian population. A reasonably high literacy rate⁵⁹ combined with the characteristics

⁵⁷ The reference to ‘Machiavelo’ might have been referring to *Discorsi. La doppia impiccata, o vero espositione della necessita all’augustissimo tribunale della sapienza contro le ragioni della doppia*, of which there were various editions with false printing details, for example, Orbitello (instead of Amsterdam), by Cesare Cesari (instead of Abraham Wolfgang), 1667. This pasquinade-style pamphlet in the form of trial records is attributed to Gregorio Leti: Franco Barcia, *Bibliografia delle opere di Gregorio Leti* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1981), p. 143.

⁵⁸ ASV, *Sant’Uffizio*, b. 120, Don Giovanni Lapi file, trial against Don Giovanni Lapi, written denunciation presented by Giovanni Roverella on 1 September 1678. ‘[A]nd sent copies of it particularly to Endenara’, concluded Roverella. He meant Lendinara, near Rovigo.

⁵⁹ For the late sixteenth century, Paul Grendler has put forward the theory that the literacy rate in Venice was 33 per cent among the male population, and fluctuated between 12.2 and 13.2 per cent among the female population: Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), pp. 43–7 and *Renaissance Education between Religion and Politics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), in particular pp. 84ff. It is reasonable to suppose that it increased progressively in the next century. However, as is often the case, it was a differentiated form of literacy, in the sense that many people knew how to read but could not write. There is an example in ASV,

of the city, in which certain complementary functions that also extended outside the domestic realm guaranteed various access opportunities to written texts, made people in the city particularly sensitive to the influences of writing.⁶⁰ At the same time reading was put forward as a desacralized social object, whether shared or otherwise, more of a habitual act than a ritual, contributing to a much larger number of opportunities for a text to be used, regardless of whether this was voluntary or not. While public reading was intentional in character, the widespread practice of reading aloud created conditions for a more involved role for the text, which could then reach an indefinite number of individuals.⁶¹ These were perhaps the initial stirrings, somewhat ahead of time for a setting such as Venice, of the 'reading revolution' which according to some scholars led city readerships to break free from political and religious authorities, accompanying and reflecting in some way the birth of bourgeois public space.⁶²

Sant'Uffizio, b. 129, trial against Don Ippolito Basilio, spontaneous appearances by Eleonora de Angelis on 2 December and Zanetta de Angelis on 9 December 1698 and deposition by Meneghina de Angelis on 23 December 1698: although they were habitual readers, the three sisters signed their respective depositions with a cross. In the same way, in 1702 Paolina Brusatti, a prostitute, told the Inquisitor that she could not write, but 'I can read printed books, and also writing in pen when it is written clearly and well': ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 130, trial against Paolina Brusatti, Giovan Battista Alfieri, Caterina Luchini and Don Vincenzo Pascarelli, deposition by Paolina on 17 August 1702.

⁶⁰ The opportunities that the illiterate public had to access writing are now well known, above all thanks to the work of Roger Chartier and Donald McKenzie. See, as examples, Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994) and Donald F. McKenzie, *Oral Culture, Literacy and Print in Early New Zealand: The Treaty of Waitangi* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1985). There are also important considerations in Giovanni Levi, *L'eredità immateriale. Carriera di un esorcista nel Piemonte del Seicento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), p. 82. Such mediation work was the norm in the domestic environment. Take the case of the student who read the *Corriero svaligiato* and a series of obscene songs and books to the female innkeeper at the inn where he was staying in Padua in 1651: Kermol, *La rete di Vulcano*, trial 161, spontaneous appearance by Giovanni Daniele Bartoli at the Sant'Uffizio in Udine on 15 April 1651, pp. 116–17. Essential reading for a student in Padua in the mid-seventeenth century: included *Adone* by Marino, *Rete di Vulcano* and *Rettorica delle puttane* by Ferrante Pallavicino and *Lucerna* by Pona: *ibid.*, trial 159, spontaneous appearance by Pietro Paolo Locatelli on 14 April 1651, pp. 115–16. From what was gathered from other trials, an average student supplemented these with varying numbers of other titles from the libertine output or theology texts which could be procured from German coursemates.

⁶¹ To mention just one case, in 1652 canon Bernardo Andreucci, a reader of the *Corriero svaligiato*, was worried that somebody might have 'heard the reading I gave': *ibid.*, trial 183, spontaneous appearance on 27 March 1652 before the Sant'Uffizio in Udine, p. 121.

⁶² On the matter of the 'revolution', see among others Reinhard Wittmann, 'Una "Rivoluzione della lettura" alla fine del XVIII secolo?', in Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger

A good example is Domenico Casellato cobbler's workshop, which a manservant from Ca' Mora visited for business one day in August 1683. He was carrying a handwritten book and read out a couple of chapters from it. Those present did not take long to recognize it as one of Aretino's works, but even though the less-than-uplifting reading was conducted by someone who had a reputation for not believing in God or heaven, they listened enthusiastically.⁶³ It must have been a habitual pastime in *botteghe* and houses and although it was by no means limited to prohibited readings – in 1697, for example, a group of artisans listened to readings from *Lives of the Saints* by a little girl during lunch at the house of the Nunzio's gondolier⁶⁴ – it did not completely exclude heterodox texts either.⁶⁵ When on 7 April 1648 the nobleman Guglielmo de Egreis from Friuli visited the Sant'Uffizio in Udine, he issued a particularly explicit testimony in this respect. He had 'read *Il corriere svaligiato* in the *bottega* owned by Mr Giuseppe Fabris, who was reading it'. Then, while staying at an inn in Venice, he had come across a 'song which spoke badly of Pope Urban and some cardinals': he was not able to say whether 'I got it or heard it from a doctor from Ferrara'. In other words 'I don't know whether it was given to me to read or whether I heard it read out'.⁶⁶

Chartier (eds), *Storia della lettura* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1995), pp. 337–69; Hans E. Bödeker, 'D'une "histoire littéraire du lecteur" à "l'histoire du lecteur": bilan et perspectives', in Roger Chartier (ed.), *Histoires de la lecture. Un bilan de recherches* (Paris: Imec, 1995), pp. 93–124. The issue is analysed in the light of the censorship question in eighteenth-century Tuscany, with a particular emphasis on territorial diversity, in Sandro Landi, *Il governo delle opinioni. Censura e formazione del consenso nella Toscana del Settecento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2000), pp. 9–13.

⁶³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 151, *Miscellanea processi* file, spontaneous appearance by Giacomo Petronio on 19 August 1683.

⁶⁴ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 129, Doctor Neri file, trial against Antonio Giuliani, spontaneous appearance by Francesco Bernardoni on 28 February 1697 and by Melchiorre Molziner on 21 August 1698. Reading had marked the start of a slide towards heterodox themes in this case too.

⁶⁵ *This was not only a Venetian matter. In 1650 in Udine a certain Giacomo Marinoni appointed a bottega assistant to read Lucerna and Messalina by Pona 'in the presence of the children of the house in the evening around the fire': Kermol, La rete di Vulcano, trial 95, spontaneous appearance by Giacomo Marinoni on 6 January 1650, p. 96.*

⁶⁶ Kermol, *La rete di Vulcano*, trial 11, pp. 76–7. The combination of reading and listening was fairly common. In 1674 the previously mentioned Teodoro Paganin, who possessed several heretical works, was unable to proceed at length with his reading because 'when I read as above, when I heard those things they disturbed my mind': ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 119, trial against Giovanni Zucco, spontaneous appearance by Teodoro Paganin on 16 June 1676.

Communities of interpretation

With regard to the audience of readers, after establishing that the availability of texts enabled different people to come into contact with heterodox ideas in equally varied ways, we can ask ourselves to what extent written texts intervened to create alternative ideas, feelings, ideologies and forms of religiousness.⁶⁷ In this respect there was certainly no lack of texts shaped around explicit criticism of orthodoxy or indeed of readers interested in them. It would be wrong, however, to limit the opportunities to generate non-conformist thought to texts which set out to do so. In general readers rarely adopted a passive attitude towards a text: they read it in accordance with their personal approaches, interpreting it in an original way, revising the content and transmitting it by selecting, editing and underlining different elements.

This applied to any text: for example, Francesco Capozzo from Vicenza made an elementary attempt at exegesis by taking the words 'In the beginning was the Word' of John 1.1 and deducing that the Word was not eternal.⁶⁸ When orthodox literature was used as a point of comparison, there could also be different effects: in 1659 Giacomo Pistocchia, a jurist from Udine, developed a passion for labelling heresies after reading a book entitled 'Nova Lux'.⁶⁹ Therefore, when a woman told him that her husband had said 'my things came from the devil', Giacomo put two and two together and concluded that 'it seems to me like the opinions of certain heretics who maintain that the devil is the master of this inferior world'.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ In one way or another the matter brings to mind the question posed by Roger Chartier, namely whether books can cause revolutions: Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

⁶⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 137, trial against Francesco Capozzo, spontaneous appearance by Giulio Orgiano on 27 June 1713. There was not much point in banning the Bible in the vernacular as biblical passages could be found in dozens of easily accessible publications and as people like Ferrante Pallavicino could – or rather managed to – publish biblically-based works: 'this Bible that Pallavicino uses is highly unusual, as he seems to find nothing but scandalously erotic scenes in it, along with heroines who seem more like Venetian courtesans than women from the Old Testament': Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, p. 181. As Claudio Varese noted, Pallavicino commented 'politically, that is uninhibitedly' on the sacred text, as if it were 'an account of a profane historical event': Claudio Varese, 'Momenti e implicazioni del romanzo libertino nel Seicento italiano', in Sergio Bertelli (ed.), *Il libertinismo in Europa* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1980), pp. 239–69, at p. 250.

⁶⁹ This was probably Fra' Ignazio Lupo, *Nova lux in edictum S. Inquisitionis ad praxim sacramenti poenitentiae [...] auctore R. P. F. Ignatio Lupo* (Bergomi: Typis M. A. Rubei, 1648).

⁷⁰ Kermol, *La rete di Vulcano*, trial 354, spontaneous appearance by Giacomo Pistocchia at the Sant'Uffizio in Udine on 27 January 1659, p. 151.

With regard to heterodox books in particular, reading was often carried out with a well-defined aim related to a dispute or discussion, or in order to be introduced to an idea. In this respect the practice of reading was closely linked to a type of thinking that had to be expressed and therefore had an intrinsically public nature. Texts were scoured for doctrines, formulations or discourses so that they could be borrowed and presented or used to try to interpret what had been learnt in discussions with others. The exchange and trade of books was therefore a necessary condition for the formation of a market of words, ideas and opinions, that is to say the emergence of a public sphere of autonomous thought. In this way reading became a preparatory activity for discussion, carried out in view of the social use that could be made of the thoughts that were encountered. To this end readers often returned to the same works to try to absorb the images and thoughts that they found more effectively and make them their own. As a certain Francesco Bertucci from Tolmezzo said to the Sant'Uffizio in Udine in 1650, 'frequently in conversation ... Marino's concepts came into my head and to my lips ... and I made use of them'. With regard to the future, in order to reassure the Inquisitor he promised that he would 'not put forward any of Adone's ideas and sayings that come to mind, but what's more, I'll try to forget them to the best of my ability'.⁷¹

In general it is difficult to measure the intellectual adherence of readers – and of the authors themselves for that matter – to a text, and it is clearly impossible to establish with precision the criteria used to appropriate a piece of writing by such a varied group of readers in terms of social background and intellectual grounding.⁷² Any attempt made in this respect clashes with the simple fact that in addition to not knowing details about the readers, we do not know either exactly which texts were used, what they were like in physical terms and therefore the paths that led people to read them.⁷³ Locke had already highlighted how the

⁷¹ Ibid., trial 105, spontaneous appearance by Francesco Bertucci on 11 April 1650, pp. 103–4. This was a use of reading that naturally caused concern. It was therefore better to claim in court that the reading had been done 'out of curiosity' and definitely not 'to make use of it for bad things'. In practice, however, the two reasons constantly seem to be entwined.

⁷² The traditional point of reference for the gap between text and understanding is naturally Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, which uses the expression 'aggressive originality of [Menocchio's] reading'. Furthermore, 'if there is always a gap between the content of a text and how and to what extent it is understood, this gap tends to increase considerably in the case of less informed readers, in whom the written word induces unexpected associations of ideas': Infelise, *I libri proibiti*, p. 52.

⁷³ This is one of the main investigative areas of analytical bibliographies. For a primer on this topic, which is only briefly alluded to here, see Donald F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and *Making Meaning. 'Printers of the Mind' and Other Essays*, P.D. McDonald and M.F. Suarez (eds) (Amherst:

printing layout of biblical chapters and verses made it easier to interpret them as separate entities which could be used for polemical purposes, but that by doing so one lost sight of consequential reasoning. In other words, this type of layout opened the way to using Scripture as a repertory of examples, fragments which could easily be shaped to fit each person's intentions. Those who wished to do so could choose the most suitable verses from the Bible either in order to disprove them or argue in favour of their religious faith.⁷⁴

The layout of a text and the way in which it was presented were therefore not neutral elements but rather factors which influenced the text appropriation process. We must be careful, however, not to overlook one important dimension of the way in which heterodoxy could spread: extracts, handwritten copies, printed or handwritten leaflets and transcriptions of speeches were just as powerful vehicles of scepticism and non-conformism as the ponderous pro-Reformation or biblical criticism works. According to Giovan Francesco Pivati, a revisor, it was a question of:

single sheets, little songs sometimes against good morals, prayers which mock our holy religion rather than encourage devotion, reports of invented or ancient miracles which are passed off as recent events, apocryphal stories about Pilate, his wife, Malchus and many others. Then there are others depending on the time and the season, like *Contrasto*, comparing Venetian prostitutes with foreign ones with the dishonest proceeds moving from the former to the latter, or *Testamento del Carnevale*, which includes derisory comments against public magistrates, all things which cannot circulate for any reason. Nevertheless they are printed with impunity, reprinted and sold, if not in the Piazza [San Marco] then at least in the street, where they are displayed publicly on sale at stalls in squares on feast days. Indeed, they are the main financial capital of those who live in the square by selling these scandalous goods when they could easily sell almanacs, calendars and a hundred other lawful things instead.⁷⁵

University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (London: Faber & Faber, 1990); Chartier, *The Order of Books and Forms and Meanings: Texts, Performances, and Audiences from Codex to Computer* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

⁷⁴ John Locke, *An Essay for the Understanding of St. Paul's Epistles* (London: Printed for Awnsham and John Churchill, 1707). There is subtle, if brief, analysis of the text in McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, pp. 55–7.

⁷⁵ ASV, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, b. 370, written document dated 24 March 1743. Pivati specified that he was referring to a situation which had been dragging on for decades. This production is deeply studied in Laura Carnelos, *Libri da grida, da banco e da bottega: editoria di consumo a Venezia tra norma e contraffazione (XVII–XVIII)*, PhD thesis (Venice: Università Ca' Foscari, 2010).

There was therefore an underworld of the written word, whose exact content and form are equally unknown. And there were also cases of texts which became something else. They did not only move, perhaps in decontextualized form, from one medium to another such as from book to paper. Texts could be transformed into objects and experience unforeseen destinies and new forms of distribution. Let us take the example of the 'ivory boxes, containers for creams and tobacco' depicting 'human figures, all nude, who are brutally deploying wicked lust, men with men, women and children, some with three nudes which scandalously show the three people depicted happy with the obscenity'. The idea had occurred to an engraver from Milan, Paolo Aviat, and met with enormous success in Venice. He had simply taken a copy of 'the 60 ways of coitus depicted by Aretino' and taken inspiration from them. When he was arrested, however, this was not the only nefarious book found to be in his possession. This 'visual incitement to sensual practices by seeing wicked pleasures' could be found in almost all comb-makers', *botteghe*, *osterie* and haberdashery shops. From here they moved on to private houses and monasteries, especially female ones, where 'they are used for sinful arousal'.⁷⁶

Although readers were influenced by the form of texts to some extent, they were still active participants in the process of attributing meaning to what they read. As a number of scholars have repeatedly shown – in particular and in different ways Roger Chartier, Robert Darnton and Carlo Ginzburg, by referring implicitly or explicitly to 'reader-response theory' – it is impossible to establish a direct causal nexus between reading and inference, as reading is an active process of receiving and appropriating meaning, which can even be independent of the text used.⁷⁷ This means that texts do not induce a single model of response.

⁷⁶ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 522, internal written document of 13 March 1683 and b. 547, reports by Camillo Badoer on 8, 12 and 14 March 1683.

⁷⁷ The issue of the ways in which readers appropriated texts is now felt to be a central element of studies of the history of books, reading and culture in general. For a primer, see the essays in Cavallo and Chartier (eds), *Storia della lettura* and Chartier (ed.), *Histoires de la lecture. Un bilan de recherches*; Roger Chartier, *Lectures et lecteurs dans la France d'Ancien Regime* (Paris: Seuil, 1987) and *The Order of Books*; Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre. And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (London: Allen Lane, 1984) and *The Kiss of Lamourette*; Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*. On reader response and reception theory, see the essays collected in Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (London; New York: Routledge, 1989) and *Crossing Borders: Reception Theory, Poststructuralism, Deconstruction* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) and *The Implied Reader. Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974); Jonathan Rose, 'Rereading the English Common Reader. A Preface to a History of Audiences', *Journal of the History of*

Nevertheless, the fact remains that whenever readers appropriated a text, they tended to insert it into a perspective of socially recognized meanings with a past cultural context. The meanings attributed to it were social products connected to the reader's cultural codes, precisely because they were products of the language used. Even the most original interpretations therefore tended to refer to what Stanley Fish called a 'community of interpretation', the set of codes, language and skills in which the reader was involved.⁷⁸ It is equally true, however, that a cultural system is so broad by definition that it guarantees a range of responses to a given text which are difficult to classify satisfactorily. Nevertheless, inquisitors and censors were called upon to attempt to make such a classification, albeit unconsciously.⁷⁹

In a 'community of interpretation' where libertine and irreligious elements exerted such a strong influence that any text could potentially be used for heterodox purposes, occasional works of criticism, pamphlets and the whole varied but often slight anti-clerical output 'could ... be transformed into radical criticism: it was sufficient for the pamphlet to be removed a little from its original context and read in the light of new shocking events.'⁸⁰ All things considered, decontextualizing meaning to make it assume a more general and conclusive critical capacity was an extremely simple process. Alongside this output, widely consumed genres – such as libertine literature produced by the Incogniti group – constituted a relatively simple means for creating and confirming forms of dissent which were sometimes even fairly explicit.⁸¹ For example, the fictional

Ideas 53 (1992): 47–70 and critical remarks in Joad Raymond, 'Irrational, impactful and unprofitable: reading the news in seventeenth-century Britain', in Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (eds), *Reading, Society and the Politics in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 185–214.

⁷⁸ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

⁷⁹ In this respect, by attempting to provide a sufficient rate of predictability for responses to a text, censorship was in some way an activity that predated modern approaches by historians studying reception and reading.

⁸⁰ Niccoli, *Rinascimento anticlericale*, p. 114.

⁸¹ The obvious reference with regard to libertine literature is Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*. There is also a focus on the seventeenth-century Venetian novel in Giovanni Getto, *Il Barocco letterario in Italia. Barocco in prosa e in poesia. La polemica sul Barocco* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2000), in particular the essay 'Il romanzo veneto nell'età barocca', pp. 246–69. See also, as starting points, Varese, 'Momenti e implicazioni del romanzo libertino nel Seicento italiano', pp. 239–69; Albert N. Mancini, *Romanzi e romanzieri del Seicento* (Naples: Società editrice napoletana, 1981) and 'La narrativa libertina degli Incogniti. Tipologia e forma', *Forum Italicum*, 16 (1982): 203–29; Armando Marchi, 'Il Seicento en enfer. La narrativa libertina del Seicento italiano', *Rivista di letteratura italiana*, 2 (1984):

output, widely read at all levels, provided an extremely broad distribution network for ideas that were ready for use. When Francesco Pona praised the freedom of prostitutes in *La lucerna*, the discourse expanded progressively until it took on the meaning that an individual could not be wrong if he let himself be guided by his natural instinct.⁸²

This moral indifferentism included both indigenous elements and a personal revival of Renaissance themes. The fact remains that people like Pona acted as cultural intermediaries, presenting the results of complex reflections in simplified form so that they could be enjoyed and used by everybody. Philosophical matters were approached in an oblique uneven way and were explained by using mottos or sayings. When providing a setting for *La lucerna*, Pona chose to adopt a subject that was dangerous to say the least; the novel narrates the story of the different reincarnations of a soul in bodies which variously belonged to humans, animals and objects. At the end of its wanderings, the soul is incarnated in two oil lamps (from whence the title) belonging to Girolamo Cardano and the Veronese doctor (Pona) himself. Leaving aside the fact that being incarnated in Cardano's oil lamp could bring no good tidings for orthodoxy, it is certain that in this way influences ranging from Pythagorus and Bruno were made available to everyone. Even if the huge audience chose to continue to ignore the philosophical implications of the theme of transmigration, they at least now had an inkling of it.⁸³

The narrative patterns of varying degrees of complexity in libertine literature therefore featured issues and themes that filtered through both from above, such as from philosophical or polemical works and literary production in general, and from below, from conversations in the street and the entire spoken-word sector surrounding writers, which they were also part of to some extent. In this respect it was a formidable vehicle of heterodoxy because it offered readers a reassuring response to texts in which it was possible to find easily recognizable elements to use and adapt to one's own ideas, which took on a greater degree of credibility

351–67; Paolo Getrevi, *Dal picaro al gentiluomo. Scrittura e immaginario nel Seicento narrativo* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1986); Donatella Riposio, *Il laberinto della verità. Aspetti del romanzo libertino del Seicento* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1995).

⁸² Francesco Pona, *La lucerna di Eureka Misoscolo academico filarmonico* (Verona: Appresso Angelo Tamo, ad istanza, e spese di Florindo Marani, 1625), pp. 38–9.

⁸³ Although *La lucerna* was included in the 1626 *Index*, it was reprinted several times and enjoyed a reasonable level of distribution in handwritten form. The fact that Pona set about writing and printing an *Antilucerna* as an apology in 1648 both confirmed its enduring popularity and drew even more attention to the original work. The *Antilucerna* was printed by both Gironi in Imola and Rossi in Verona in 1648. See also Stefania Buccini, 'Note sulle edizioni de "La lucerna" di Francesco Pona', *Italica*, 82 (2005): 510–24.

thanks to the filter of the printed page. In general it supplied a vocabulary and theoretical structure for existing states of mind using rhetorical conventions that triggered a certain reaction by readers or listeners. At the same time this listening process played a productive role through a bi-directional path, which on the one hand preserved and on the other hand amplified and multiplied the number of conversations and the oral presentation of the ideas immortalized on paper.⁸⁴

In November 1676 the Inquisitor in Treviso asked the Congregazione how he should behave with regard to a strange book that had come into his hands. It was entitled *L'Alcibiade, fanciullo a scola* (*Alcibiades the Schoolboy*) and the title page said that it had been printed in Oranges in 1652. It was without doubt a dangerous book, seeing that it was about 'de vitio nefando ... et continet quoque haereses, aliaque scelera'. The cardinals ordered him to send it to Rome.⁸⁵ Written by the previously mentioned Father Antonio Rocco and printed by Giovan Francesco Loredan between 1650 and 1651, *Alcibiades* had been in circulation in handwritten form since the 1630s, so it seems a little strange that the Inquisitor and cardinals were struck by it to such a large extent.⁸⁶ It certainly did not – and would not in the future – enjoy a level of circulation comparable to other works by the Incogniti, but it fitted perfectly into the naturalistic strand typical of some major sectors of the Academy.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ These were considerations similar to those offered by Robert Darnton analysing the case of pre-revolutionary livres philosophiques in France: Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*.

⁸⁵ ACDF, S.O., *Decreta* 1676, 18 November 1676, c. 242r. Strangely, there is no record of official measures against the book. The content must have been interpreted as prohibited even though it was not officially included in the *Index*: Jesùs M. de Bujanda, *Index librorum prohibitorum*, 11 (1600–1966) (Sherbrooke: Centre d'Etudes de la Renaissance, 2002).

⁸⁶ There are few remaining examples of the two editions, both with false printing details 'Oranges, by Juan Vuart', 1652; it was probably printed by Stoer in Geneva. The author was only indicated by the letters DPA and many attributed it to Pietro Aretino. It was also long believed to be the work of Ferrante Pallavicino, an association based on the theme of pederasty, which he treated in a particularly explicit way in some letters in the *Corriero svaligiato* in 1641. On the text, see Laura Coci, 'L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola. Nota bibliografica', *Studi secenteschi*, 26 (1985): 301–32 and, more briefly, the *Nota al testo* by the same author in Antonio Rocco, *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola* (Rome: Salerno editrice, 1988), pp. 95–8. Important analysis has recently been conducted by Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, 'Antonio Rocco, Alcibiade enfant à l'école. Clandestinité, irréligion et sodomie', *Tangence*, 81 (2006): 15–38. On the question of sodomy in modern Venice, see Nicholas Davidson, 'Sodomy in Early Modern Venice', in Tom Betteridge (ed.), *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 65–81.

⁸⁷ As Cavaillé writes, it was not an isolated work, 'de la production secrète et inavouable d'un pervers érotomane, mais d'un texte qui exploite un code de lecture partagé par tout un groupe': Cavaillé, 'Antonio Rocco'.

The narrative expedient was simple enough: Filotimo, a teacher in Athens, is responsible for the education of the young Alcibiades and is irresistibly attracted to him. He undertakes to persuade him to give himself by deploying the finest rhetorical weapons and putting forward suitable arguments to overcome the boy's resistance. In this way, the development of a heated dialogue in which Alcibiades counters Filotimo's philosophy with reasons of common morality serves to demonstrate the superiority of pederasty and sodomy over heterosexual relations, an issue which was especially dear to Venetian libertinism and Antonio Rocco in particular. After touching on the issues of the naturalness of sexual instinct and the gratification of it, the focus of the book extends to the point of asserting the relativity of all human laws and the primacy of the 'law of nature',⁸⁸ also addressing the issue of the imposture of religion,⁸⁹ presented in a context which seems wholly consequential and integrated into the rising eroticism, inasmuch as the behaviour of the impostor-legislators is represented as being dictated by self-interest and unjustified from a natural point of view:

so they made laws more in the interests of the State and politics than dictated by reason and natural inclinations. Indeed, most human and religious laws are based on this damned reason of State, to the point where some of them are deemed to be venerable and sacrosanct by the foolish populace, even though they are execrable.⁹⁰

On the other hand the same legislators used the law to prohibit the same tendencies and pleasures that they cultivated personally in private. Indeed, precious things 'are valuable because they are rare, sacred things are venerable because they are distant: if milk and honey flowed in rivers, milk and honey would be thought of less highly than water'.⁹¹ Sodomy thus took on a typically libertine elitist connotation and the book carried various examples of this: while it was understandable that the plebs could accept similar impositions, 'judicious' men did not need to have any scruples in enjoying these 'celestial joys', because it was clear that 'politicians consider them to be morsels reserved for them, quality game, unique life-giving fruit'.⁹² Only a malicious god would give men irresistible

⁸⁸ 'I define the laws of nature ... those which come from the light of intellect to all men, from whatever group or nation, naturally, without artifice, from the cradle onwards, and which are approved by the universal consent of everybody, by the wisest and the most righteous': Rocco, *L'Alcibiade fanciullo a scola*, p. 62.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 56–9, 60–62 and 80.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 56. Indeed, this argument was widely present in public discussions.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 50.

⁹² Ibid.

proclivities so that he could punish them.⁹³ This radical deism accompanies much of the libertine repertory that Filotimo sets forth in his attempts at persuasion. The achievement of his goal marks not only a sexual victory but also represents intellectual success, unequivocally ratified by Alcibiades' acceptance of his teacher's amorous proposals, and therefore implicitly by adherence to the adages that he had fought against on ethical grounds. Moving ethical indifferentism into the field of sexual morality made it possible to attract the reader on to favourable ground and to use argumentative techniques with guaranteed effects. Issues which were generally connected to heterodox Aristotelianism in Padua were integrated into a narrative framework which made it easier to learn about them or at least receive them unknowingly.⁹⁴ The mechanism could prove to be highly effective in this respect, and indeed the structure employed in *Alcibiades*, whereby sexual initiation becomes a philosophical apprenticeship, came to constitute a kind of model that was fully realized a century later by D'Argens with *Thérèse philosophe*.⁹⁵ One only has to think of the popularity of Aretino's works to see that obscene or pornographic texts were nothing new, but the

⁹³ Ibid., p. 63.

⁹⁴ The description of sexually explicit situations to transmit messages which were thus relegated to the background was a fairly common instrument for criticizing orthodoxy and its institutions or spreading the heterodox word, although it was structured in very different ways and terms. For example, Ferrante Pallavicino could shape his anti-curial works around a polemic mainly targeted against the stock of sexual habits, while in other cases, such as the *Rettorica delle puttane*, the erotic subject matter aimed to build satire targeted at Jesuit pedagogy. Eroticism and pornography were therefore used both for purely critical or satirical purposes and as vehicles of heterodox proposals. On Ferrante and his output, see Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, pp. 177–217. The question of pornography is a complex one: Sarah Toulalan has remarked that 'A definition of pornography in different historical periods is ... likely to be fluid, eluding our best efforts to pin it down and state with precision what it means in a way that is recognizable to our modern understanding but also fits with what we know about earlier societies'. As such, there 'remains a great deal of confusion over exactly what constitutes 'pornography' in any particular period': see Sarah Toulalan, *Imagining Sex: Pornography and Bodies in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). This field has been the subject of great attention, especially recently. There is an abundant supply of essays on the matter. See François Moureau and Alain-Marc Rieu (eds), *Eros philosophe. Discours libertins des Lumières* (Geneva and Paris: Champion, 1984); Lynn Hunt (ed.), *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500–1800* (New York: Zone Books, 1993); Jean Marie Goulemot, *Ces livres qu'on ne lit que d'une main. Lecture et lecteurs de livres pornographiques au XVIIIe siècle* (Aix en Provence: Alinea, 1991); Turner, *Schooling Sex*. There are some interesting considerations in Joan de Jean, *The Reinvention of Obscenity: Sex, Lies and Tabloids in Early Modern France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁹⁵ De Boyer d'Argens, *Thérèse philosophe*.

level of danger represented by his form of pornography was not even minimally comparable to the fear generated by seventeenth-century libertine literature, even though many of the themes and styles used were the same. Nunzio Francesco Vitelli recognized exactly the same gap between the works of Aretino and Ferrante Pallavicino. When asking for the latter to be imprisoned in 1643, he said in the Collegio: 'I have read some things by Aretino, and I find some good things, he wrote with the freedom of those times before the Council, he must have written some things when he was young, which are not so sound, but in the end there are some good things'. The same things could not be said about the works of the Incogniti academic, which were not only less than sound but also extended their influence well beyond the pleasantness or satisfaction they gave to the reader, intellectual or otherwise.⁹⁶ Plain philosophy and eroticism were therefore constantly merged and overlapped in libertine literature, giving rise to what would become the great tradition of 'philosophical pornography' in eighteenth-century France.⁹⁷ After all, while the regulation of customs passed visibly if not mainly through the regulation of sexual behaviour, it was natural that the libertine response took place in the field of sexual freedom.⁹⁸ This structured response adopted the sex-philosophy pairing in an attempt to target the entire ecclesiastical operation for controlling consciences and distribute the instruments for attacking Christianity or religion in general. The *Alcibiades* case is especially interesting in this respect: the sexual act is only carried out at the end of the text and is only hinted at by reading between the lines. Sex is omnipresent, but only as an end and a pretext. Filotimo's technique is above all a work of intellectual persuasion, whose effects go well beyond the carnal relations he has with Alcibiades at the end. The argument almost seems to be hidden behind obscene terms, but it was the latter that gave it the strength and flexibility that inevitably appealed to readers.

Libertine novels did not develop reasoning marked by logical passages; they were not philosophy books and it was not their task to be so. They limited themselves to presenting sayings, expressions and assertions that were validated when inserted into the narrative context and more or less blended into it. Their persuasive value lay in the acumen which they bestowed on the

⁹⁶ ASV, *Collegio, Esposizioni Roma*, reg. 34, c. 7v [26], presentation on 13 March 1643.

⁹⁷ See Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*.

⁹⁸ Also from this point of view I think we should tone down the distinction suggested by Pintard, which is still widely shared, between 'libertinage érudit' and 'libertinage des mœurs'. While on the one hand it is true that behaviour does not always conform to theoretically-based beliefs, on the other hand, as mentioned previously, the issue of behaviour – especially in terms of its repercussions on sexual morality – forms an important aspect of unbelief and libertinism.

text, their rhetorical devices and the extent to which they were recognized by an audience who identified their prerequisites. While Dirrag's philosophy in *Thérèse philosophe* was inspired by La Mettrie, Filotimo's philosophy in *Alcibiades* came more modestly from the Padua school of heterodox Aristotelianism and its form of naturalism, perhaps intertwined with more common libertine themes.

Although they do not completely coincide, similar considerations could be made for a large part of the libertine output – in particular in Venice – in the period broadly ranging from the 1620s to the 1660s, which remained in circulation for many decades. It is true that the anti-curialism of Loredan, with his *Dianea*, Maiolino Bisaccioni or Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato had different connotations, passing mainly through political attack and the mythicization of figures like Gustavus Adolphus or Wallenstein, one a Protestant and the other a renowned unbeliever. However, they all had the basic effect of acting as vehicles for messages and formulae which essentially expressed dissent against the official religion and consequently making them public.⁹⁹ These were the messages bequeathed by the libertine literature of Antonio Rocco, Ferrante Pallavicino and others like them which still found a wide audience in the next century, ready to be inserted into new horizons of thought. They progressively supplied instruments for not believing, for questioning revealed truths or simply for convincing oneself and others that it was possible to believe in a different way or in something else. As was the case in eighteenth-century France, readers then 'probably also employed the perspectives of their reading to interpret new items picked up from the talk of others. By reading forbidden books they took part in radicalizing public opinion'.¹⁰⁰ Through such works the vocabulary of dissent started to take on new, more widespread meanings. It should therefore come as no surprise that in the mid-eighteenth century Ferrante Pallavicino was found as an influence alongside Baruch Spinoza and Pierre Bayle in shaping and supplying codes of expression to the hatter Bortolo Zorzi and his 'free metaphysicians'.

A hatter's library

Prologue: indifferent talk

On one day at the beginning of October 1737 a discussion was in progress, as normal, in Bortolo Zorzi's hat *bottega* in Campo della Fava just down from the

⁹⁹ Spini, *Ricerca dei libertini*, pp. 164–76. See also Marco Cavarzere, *La prassi della censura nell'Italia del Seicento. Tra repressione e mediazione* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e letteratura, 2011).

¹⁰⁰ Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, p. 191.

bridge at the start of Calle degli Stagneri. Those present were probably there by chance, like people gathering in a café. While Bortolo had to be present for reasons of work, the noblemen Antonio Dolfi and Vittore Molin must have gone in to look around, expecting one of the regular discussions that was taking place at that moment inside the *bottega* with numerous onlookers. There was also a young priest, left there by his brother so that he could attend to some domestic matters, who limited himself to listening to some 'truly indifferent talk' about printing books. He listened to them for about two hours before his brother came back to get him and they went off together. They would see him again often in the future, but that 'indifferent' discussion in early October would be the start of Bortolo's downfall and the decline of his 'free metaphysicians'.

The start of the trial

Two years later, on 28 May 1739, the young priest, 19-year-old Girolamo Zandini, appeared before the Inquisitor. He lived in Santa Maria Formosa and must have come from a fairly important family, as he lived 'on private means ... deditus studio legis canonicae'. His confessor had encouraged him to appear and recount an episode, or rather a series of episodes, that had involved him from 1737 onwards. He told of his brief visit to the *bottega* at the beginning of October and what he had heard there. He did not say what effect it had on him, but he cannot have been wholly indifferent to it, as one evening later in the same month he found himself on a walk with some friends in front of the *bottega* and:

having heard raised voices coming from the same bottega, which was full of people, my curiosity led me to enter the bottega with my aforementioned companions to hear what they were arguing about, and I stopped there with the others and heard that they were discussing the subject of divine grace, although I can't say exactly which opinions the dispute was about, or which beliefs were defended.

In light of what emerged during the trial, it is reasonable to suppose that these beliefs were not all exemplarily orthodox or unconditionally supportive of the Church of Rome in nature. They did, however, manage to capture the attention of Zandini and his friends when they joined the group of onlookers. Inside, in addition to Bortolo, the proprietor, they found Girolamo Rottini, 'he was a scholar in Padua and is now a doctor by profession here', two students from the University of Padua, a Servite friar from Milan studying theology, an Augustinian friar, another hatter who 'as a joke called himself Berrettino the philosopher' and a *bottega* assistant for Cambiasio the merchant, later discovered to be Ponziano Conti, an extremely active gazetteer at the time who had a close relationship

with the erudite Franciscan Fra' Giovanni degli Agostini, the librarian at the monastery of the Observant Friars Minor of San Francesco della Vigna.¹⁰¹ There was also a priest, Giovanni Giacomo Rupelli, from the church of San Marco, who was also the librarian at Ca' Pisani in Santo Stefano.

It was therefore a fairly varied group in terms of social affiliation and cultural background and was not completely shut off from the outside world. The young priest immediately became part of the group and became an assiduous frequenter of the *bottega* for a number of months until the last week of carnival in 1738. The group was later augmented by Count Stefano Balzi from Vicenza, introduced by Rottini, and Bortolo's nephew, a young priest who studied with the Jesuits. Zandini told the Inquisitor that various topics were covered during these crowded meetings. Some of these were 'indifferent', but others, those which lent the discussions their tone, were extremely dangerous:

they were debating the existence of God, the existence of the soul, religion and grace. As far as I could understand from their discussion, they were denying the existence of God with arguments which I cannot remember. I only remember that I answered them using the arguments which can be read in Father Segneri's works, which they, however, objected to. They brought proof of the mortality of the soul, they said that religion was the invention of human politics.

On the basis of what he heard, he was able to conclude that Bortolo, 'Berettin the philosopher', Rottini, Count Balzi and the merchant Cambiasio's youngster were all clearly atheists. He could not speak out with regard to the others, because at least in his presence they had exercised a certain degree of caution in expressing themselves. He had, however, heard it said that Bortolo's nephew had 'been subverted and filled with the wicked sayings of the former'. He only made a point of excluding the nobleman Vittore Molin and a Greek doctor, Giovanni Moncicò, from all responsibility; the latter was 'all piety and religion' and only went to the *bottega* when nobody else was there. It was on the basis of the visit he described and after he heard Rottini state 'see what madness it is to do so many things for a crate maker who was hanged, meaning Jesus Christ' that Zandini also ceased to have contact with the group in 1738. After this, he only occasionally stopped off at the *bottega* 'by accident' to buy a hat or have one repaired. If he had given credence to what they said during the period in question, it was only

¹⁰¹ BMC, *Provenienze diverse*, c/795, letters by Ponziano Conti to Father Giovanni degli Agostini, the librarian at San Francesco della Vigna. There are some notes about Ponziano Conti, in partnership with Carlo Perabò, in ASV, *Miscellanea atti diversi-Manoscritti*, b. 58 e in ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 711. On Giovanni degli Agostini, see Barzazi, *Gli affanni dell'erudizione*.

because of his young age. He had been born in Venice, 'an extremely religious city', and his parents had not failed to teach him the Catholic religion and 'to make my way in the study of science'. It was the curiosity aroused by his studies together with his inexperience which led him to become a habitué at the *bottega*. At the beginning, he explained:

after arguing about the aforementioned subjects, they always declared themselves to be good catholics, only engaging in debate for practise. However, as a young inexperienced man I felt troubled by these arguments, and I started, I confess to my shame, I started to doubt first the mysteries of our holy faith and then religion itself. They were aware of these doubts of mine, as I told them: who knows whether these arguments are true and it is really as you say? They immediately added that the above-mentioned people were known atheists, namely the hatter, Rottini and Baretin, that a man of spirit must be free of mind and not subjugate his mind to anything, and that one only needs to analyze religion to understand that it is make-believe.

As a result of his willingness to accept what he was told, they started trusting him and began to speak more freely in his presence, 'and I did not hear them making the protests that they used to any more'. The process of the erosion of his faith was by now unbridled:

from these doubts about religion and the mysteries of faith, I started feeling indifference towards everything that the holy Church teaches us. Therefore I don't even know if I had become an atheist like them, given that I sometimes heard secret voices inside me telling me: if these people are wrong, you are lost forever. However, I opposed these voices of grace with the arguments that I heard and maintained my former indifference.

He felt the need to tell others about his doubts and discussed them at length with a young Greek man, Michele Hauzin, who confided to him that he also nurtured similar apprehensions but wanted to die a Christian and so forced himself to go on believing. Things were a little more complicated for Zandini at the time, as he had found ample confirmation of the ideas heard during meetings in the reading that he had undertaken in parallel. In particular, Rottini had procured for him 'a bad book said to be by Spinoza' from the Pisani library. The librarian, the priest Rupelli, had been generous with the loan and Rottini had taken advantage to copy 'the treatise of *Ethics* contained in the said book, and I also think *De emendatione intellectus* was included in the same book'. The copying process took about a month. Even Zandini transcribed 'the first part,

which is about God, where it proves that God does not exist, with the beginning of the second, where it talks about the mortality of the soul'.¹⁰²

From his exchanges with the others and through books, he had therefore concluded 'that God is a chimera, the soul is mortal, religion is an invention of man and similar things'. If God had existed, his new friends argued, he would have appeared in such a way as to make it impossible to deny his existence, 'in the same way that nobody can deny the existence of the sun, because it can be seen'. The true religion would therefore have had a character which distinguished it as such:

and this character must be the head, who must be known by everybody. But it happens that this character is not just found in the Christian religion but in all religions, in as much as all religions can boast their own miracles, martyrs, prophets and so on. Therefore if the other religions are a human invention, the Christian religion is too.

It is clear that this was a repertory of ideas that had been in circulation for some time, a textbook selection of late libertinism that owed as much to Paduan heterodox Aristotelianism as it did to Machiavellianism and the general body of irreligious doctrines typical of the seventeenth-century libertine tradition. Zandini himself could not remember exactly which arguments had been used to prove the conclusions which he and the other members had reached. After all, it was the conclusions themselves which counted most. He might have been persuaded of these by the fact that he could make completely free use of reason for the first time. In addition to causing him a certain giddiness, which he tried to dispel by referring his doubts to others, being 'free of mind' led him to combine different theories in a wholly uncontrolled manner and build beliefs that made him stand out. For some reason, however, he became disillusioned in the long term: perhaps it was the intrusive figure of Rottini that distanced him from the group, even though he had never really become a fully-fledged

¹⁰² It was definitely easier to procure Spinoza's texts at this time than in the past. In as late as 1697 Michelangelo Fardella had only been able to get hold of them thanks to the intervention of Magliabechi, to whom he expressed great gratitude 'as I haven't even been able to read them before as they are extremely rare, and I've only read parts of them in the works of other authors who challenge doctrine': Michelangelo Fardella, *Lettere ad Antonio Magliabechi (1691–1709)*, transcription, re-ordering and historical-critical comment by S. Femiano (Cassino: Editrice Garigliano, 1978), p. 73, letter XXVII (15), dated Venice, 5 October 1697. On the fundamental rift caused by Spinoza's thought, a turning point in European intellectual debate, the obvious reference point is Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, in particular pp. 157–327.

member, or alternatively his qualms of conscience might have become too strong. In any case, Zandini concluded his deposition by making it clear that he had never taken part in the meetings held on feast days in the hatter's house. He had, however, often seen the participants 'together in Piazza San Marco'; he almost seems to have been emphasizing the fact that he had never managed to penetrate the inner sanctum of the group. He also underlined that Rottini was 'an atheist, and a baron, which means he is extremely immoral'.¹⁰³

Complications

Zandini did not return until 21 July, after having been ordered to do so to conclude the investigation. After having conducted the first interview on his own without any help from the Savi and therefore outside a formal Sant'Uffizio session, the Inquisitor probably wanted to register his deposition in order to make it official. However, on this occasion too Zandini found himself alone before the Inquisitor and so he was made to abjure again and invited to return once more.¹⁰⁴ In the meantime, on 10 June the Inquisitor had received a visit from a priest from Rovigno, Giovan Francesco Savioli. In Venice he lived in the house of a nobleman, Morosini, in San Cancian – understandably he made a point of emphasizing this – and said Mass in the parish of Sant'Aponal, the same one in which Bortolo lived. He explained how one evening at the beginning of March he had found himself in the Piazza San Marco, where he usually spent his time by alternating visits to the Caffè della Rosa, under the Procuratie, with walks in the square in the company of another cleric, Benedetto Maccarini, a deacon. On one of these walks they had come across two strangers and started to chat to them. He only found out later that the pair in question were Girolamo Rottini and Count Stefano Balzi:

So we started talking together while strolling around the Piazza, and as the aforementioned Don Benedetto knew that I dabbled in poetry, he turned to the other two and sang my praises in this respect, and together all three forced me to recite a few sonnets, which I then did: and we continued strolling and chatting only about poetry until one o' clock at night, and then I left ... and this was the first time I met them.

The initial approach was therefore in keeping with the common rules of city sociability: a café, the Piazza San Marco and conversations that sprung up

¹⁰³ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 143, trial against Bortolo Zorzi, Girolamo Rottini and Girolamo Zandini, spontaneous appearance by Zandini on 28 May 1739.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., spontaneous appearance and abjuration by Zandini on 21 July 1739.

spontaneously all over the place. On this occasion, poetry, the subject tackled, cannot have aroused too much suspicion in the priest, who met the pair again on the following day accompanied by the deacon. After inviting the priest to join them, they moved to the Caffè di Biasetti, under the Procuratie Nove, where the two strangers seemed to be regular customers:

and we went in there and sat down together, and they started talking about various matters in my presence, I remember they were philosophical matters in particular, that is about the existence of matter, the immortality of the soul, the creation of the world, the first Being, physical promotion, accidents etc. and they discussed them according to the systems of the different philosophers. I remember that when dealing with the immortality of the soul, they put forward the system that proves it is mortal and said that considering the senses, which are material, it must be said that the soul was also material: indeed it could not receive any impression from material things if it was spiritual. However, I cannot swear that they did not speak in ways other than putting forward the opinions of the said philosophers. And they said these things all together, like they were arguing with each other. I do not remember and cannot say that I said anything, or said a word, but I was just listening. In this way we spoke on this and other subsequent evenings about the above-mentioned points, with other different arguments which I cannot remember exactly now, but always in the form of a debate. This continued until Easter and during this time I did not notice that they were making any special errors.

I do not believe that Savioli's silences should be taken too seriously. After all, it was fairly natural that he should try to underline to the Inquisitor how his occasional comments had been shaped by the most proven form of orthodoxy. In any case, he did not feel that everything they said was dangerous: discussions focused on a range of topics, such as 'the corruption of current morals', although even on this matter one of the two strangers – for it seems they remained strangers for a long time – found a way to draw conclusions based on faith, namely that people were forced to believe and definitely did not do so freely. They also spoke about the Eucharist 'and introduced the errors of heretics in the said article into their conversation, and I remember in particular hearing this word: impanation, which was Luther's mistake'. They then returned to the subject of the creation of the world 'and they said that the world had not been created but was eternal, explaining the system of philosophers who claimed this'. Even processions provided an opportunity to express doubts: an Augustinian who joined the group said that their great ostentation of wealth was completely out of place, as they could have used the silver from the Scuole Grandi to finance military action against the Turks for example.

Although Don Giovan Francesco justified himself by claiming that he was not ‘well-versed in these subjects’, these words provoked sharp intellectual anxiety. As he explained, there were ‘certain arguments which remained imprinted in my mind in a confused way when I heard their discussions’, so much so that he was driven to make attempts at autonomous reflection. One Saturday in Campo di Santa Maria Formosa:

listening to the anonimo saltinbanco, I heard that he was asked the following question, namely whether the soul has any sign on life if separated from the body. On hearing this question I turned to a young abbot standing next to me who I did not know, and said to him: to such a question I would deny the existence ... and I added: and to speak as a philosopher, regardless of being Catholic, I could say that when matter is given, its shape is also given: which is the same, as I’ve heard said, that the soul is mortal. And also turning to the same young abbot, I told him not to be shocked, as I was a good Catholic, and that I did not believe in what I had said, but that it was only a saying that I had heard and learnt from the three above-mentioned gentlemen, while they were discussing it and arguing about it.¹⁰⁵

Other voices

By now some of the mechanisms used in the propagation of dissent have become clear. Rather than the result of passive reception, the spread was the product of dialogue between elements of different origins. Discussions focusing on heterodox doctrines could take place in a hatter’s *bottega*, caf  s or squares, where people read books, exchanged opinions and overheard rumours. Whether the necessary conditions for diffusion were created within organized groups seeking external branches through some of their members or sprang up autonomously from readings or personal reflections influenced by certain states of mind, the fact remains that they were able to merge and expand as a result of the abundance of meeting places. Therefore, it was not so strange that news of a discussion that had taken place inside a hatter’s *bottega* in the Fava reached St Mark’s Square and became a topic of heated discussion among increasingly large groups of people.

As a matter of fact, Bortolo’s name should not have been completely unknown to the Inquisitor, Fra’ Paolo Manuelli. About a year after he took up residence in Venice and more than a year before Zandini denounced the hatter’s group, on 30 January 1738 a priest from Malamocco, a certain Don Innocenzo Cherubini, appeared at the Sant’Uffizio. He had some extremely important things to disclose, given that the year before towards the end of August – he

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., spontaneous appearance by Don Giovan Francesco Savioli on 10 June 1739.

could not remember whether it was 25 or 26 August – he had met Abbot Giovan Domenico Bonlini and recognized a clear danger to souls from the words he heard. The Abbot had introduced himself by boasting the title ‘excellency’, so he had thought that he was a nobleman. He could certainly say that he was a man of letters and was well informed on matters of faith. They had a discussion with subtle reasoning about the pope’s authority, asking themselves whether or not it was possible to impose precepts. Bonlini concluded that there was nothing wrong with eating meat on days when it was forbidden as long as it was done in secret, as he felt that the basic issue was to avoid causing a scandal. Their conversation continued on 9 October at Cherubini’s sister’s house in Venice, where the Abbot was staying. While they were having lunch, Bonlini put forward the suggestion that ‘everybody is saved in his sect’. When reproached, he brought up ‘the law of nature’: it seemed obvious to him that anybody could be saved by professing his own faith, ‘but by living according to the law of nature’. Not content with this, he added that auricular confession was not ‘divine law’. Cherubini naturally protested by quoting an evangelical passage in support of the Catholic cause, but the Abbot challenged him and explained:

in a way that I didn’t understand, and I only understood that that text proved that aural confession was *de iure divino*. Then he added that the task of confessors was simply *audire et absolvere*. As we were in the middle of an ongoing discussion on those matters, he then said that simple fornication is not an evil in itself, but is prohibited because of the trouble it can cause ... therefore only prohibited on the basis of economic logic, but not because it is an evil in itself.

Cherubini had repeated his stance a few days before going to the Sant’Uffizio, adding that ‘before Moses it was not prohibited, but that after it was prohibited by written law, and in consequence it is only evil as it is prohibited’, underlining that ‘all things are evil when prohibited by God’. He then moved on to discuss more deserving wholesome works, stating ‘that these are otherwise of no merit, because they are not capable, and that all our health depends on God’, because ‘God is a remunerator of good deeds’. Cherubini protested that God was also a ‘punisher’, but ‘never wanted to concede that this was an attribute of God, and he never answered me concerning this. And I have good reason to think that he retains that God is not a punisher’. Cherubini was then sure that he had tried to persuade the others that ‘there is no hell, and that hell is merely a fear’, that ‘the Council of Trent is not universal, not distinguishing between dogma and the discipline established in the same Council, and he said this because the said Council was not accepted in some parts’. He now feared for the salvation of his

sister's soul, a matter about which the Abbot said certain things only to 'deceive' people.

All this had taken place between the final months of 1737 and January of the following year. The doctrines expounded by Bonlini were connected to a long tradition combining anti-clericalism, pro-Reformation feelings and perhaps some elements of libertine criticism. They certainly cannot have been the worst things the Inquisitor had ever heard and indeed nothing more came of it. The Inquisitor's curiosity was not even aroused by a detail in Cherubini's tale which should have attracted his attention. It was an almost casual hint in a strange reference made by Bonlini, stating while 'laughing that the universal Church is narrowed down to a few people, and named a hatter called Bortolo, and other people who I can't remember'.¹⁰⁶

It is difficult to say whether the Abbot was an assiduous habitué of meetings in the hatter's *bottega* or whether he had simply heard about them. A mere two years later, however, the same Inquisitor found himself before this small group, including Girolamo Rottini and even 'a hatter called Bortolo'. For the time being, however, Zandini's circumstantial accusations were left aside. Indeed, more than a year went by before the Sant'Uffizio showed fresh interest in Bortolo's sect. There had probably been some informal investigations during this time, but because of their nature there are no records of them in the archives. The fact that certain noblemen were involved in the affair might have dictated an approach characterized by cautious waiting, or perhaps more simply somebody was already dealing with the matter. In any case, on 22 November 1740 some documents were read out at the Sant'Uffizio including preliminary reports, memoirs and notes on action to be taken. Two documents from the Court of Vicenza were enclosed.¹⁰⁷ On 2 June 1739, just a few days after the appearance of Abbot Girolamo Zandini on 28 May and a week before Savioli's deposition on 10 June, Stefano Balzi and Camillo Egano, both noblemen from Vicenza, went to the Sant'Uffizio in Vicenza of their own accord. It might not have been a coincidence; defensive strategies were commonly adopted and the fact that someone had appeared spontaneously protected him from harsh sentences, unless it was demonstrated that his conscience had been warned. In this way one could escape with an abjuration and a promise not to repeat the mistake. Spontaneous appearances were therefore common practice and there was a plethora of them; usually those who had been members of heterodox groups did not cut ties with them completely, and so when they decided to ease their consciences, they tended to let the other interested parties know so that they

¹⁰⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 142, trial against Giovan Domenico Bonlini, spontaneous appearance by Don Innocenzo Cherubini on 30 January 1638.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, session on 22 November 1740.

could take appropriate steps. At the very least they took no steps to hide it. All this, combined with the ease of access to information regarding what happened in court, trials in progress and collected testimonies, led to a certain familiarity with this practice.

Balzi told of how he had made friends with Rottini during 1738 in Venice. Being aware of his passion for 'the new systems of philosophy', the latter introduced him to Bortolo the hatter in his famous *bottega*. Here he heard a number of conversations:

which are reminiscent of atheism, like for example the impossibility of the existence of a supreme being separate from matter, not being able to conceive ... the relationship that the spirit can have with matter. From this they deduced that God could not have been the author of this world, but that the author of everything was matter *ab aeterno* and which had assumed different forms. After posing these principles, they deduced the impossibility of the soul being spiritual, and consequently that it was impossible that it was immortal.

Although a range of different people met in the *bottega*, there were always five or six present at any one time. Only Bortolo spoke in front of them, declaring himself to be a good Christian and claiming that he was arguing 'hypothetically'. The hatter's grounding and way of expressing himself must have struck Balzi, because they showed long-term familiarity with readings and discussions of this kind. It seemed that he was setting forth his own ideas – or those of others – 'with arguments and details' that not even Balzi managed to reconstruct and recall, even though he delighted in such matters. However, when the group was reduced to just the hatter, Rottini, Balzi and a priest called Longo, all caution was thrown to the wind and 'we all spoke indifferently about these matters, and I pretended to subscribe to their ungodly opinions, although I never believed in such enormous feelings'. From their discussions they had obtained what Balzi defined as their 'impious system', a series of propositions made during these restricted meetings, propositions which they identified as their own and which they distinguished from other 'philosophical or erudite things' which also constituted topics of discussion. They had somehow provided themselves with their own philosophy and moral code. Rottini tended to assume authorship of the system, while Balzi made significant criticisms of it, at least if his account is to be believed. While Rottini concluded that God did not exist, Balzi proved that he did, and while Rottini imperatively established that 'matter *ab aeterno* was driven by itself to produce the world', Balzi claimed that the hypothesis was highly implausible. Overall Rottini was 'the most free' during discussions. He claimed that Scripture was 'a finding' produced by men. Indeed, it contained

‘repugnant things about the existence of God. Superstitious things were found in the Scriptures with regard to the ceremonies and precepts, and other matters that showed that they did not believe that the Holy Scripture had been dictated to Moses by the Holy Ghost’.

It goes without saying that the fact that Balzi presented himself as a champion of the faith should be taken with a pinch of salt. What is interesting is the fact that a group of people provided themselves with a philosophical system perceived as autonomous and recognized themselves as a ‘sect’, whose cultural centre, Bortolo’s library, was a kind of symbolic location. The Count from Vicenza said that it was well stocked and featured a range of prohibited books, of which he must have had some experience as he could boast a reading licence issued to him by the Venetian Inquisitor.¹⁰⁸ Although the *bottega* continued to be a constant point of reference for the members of the sect, they did not only meet within its four walls; discussions and reflections on philosophical issues often moved on spontaneously to cafés and St Mark’s Square. As Rottini himself recalled, ‘given that I frequently went to debates, when I then went to the said *bottega* or to other places, I presented all these controversial matters again when I spoke’.¹⁰⁹

While the sect had to remain as secret as possible in order to protect itself, it also needed an audience so that it could have a voice and express itself, and demonstrate the audacity of the conclusions which free thought was capable of reaching. The search for this audience took place within the limits imposed by these conditions. Individuals were first cautiously permitted to draw closer and were then gradually told about the fundamentally atheist doctrinal core that characterized the group. This created a form of rift between their almost esoteric appearance, typical of erudite libertinism and naturally of the Masonic movements, and their tendency to appear before a wide audience in order to seek recognition of their audacity. The dual but conflicting need to hide in separate locations and be seen – albeit with some caution – was therefore mediated through a possibly unconscious process of selecting the audience and those involved in their discussions. However, locations for discussions such as cafés and squares were by their very nature places that favoured drama, where it was natural to abandon prudence and open up the discussion to those listening, who were perhaps attracted by the ideas set forth, in a collective slide towards heterodoxy and the courtrooms of the Sant’Uffizio.

Camillo Egano, who accompanied Balzi on his visit to the Inquisitor, was one of the main beneficiaries of the public dimension that discussions between

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., deposition by Stefano Balzi to the Sant’Uffizio in Vicenza on 2 June 1739, sent in duplicate to Venice the day after.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., declaration by Girolamo Rottini on 9 December 1740.

group members sometimes assumed. He claimed that initial contact had been purely casual: when looking for the Count in a café under the Procuratie, he found him deep in conversation with Rottini in a polemical mood and another two strangers, a priest and a nobleman in fancy dress. It only needed a few words – everything started from different ‘philosophical issues’ – for the pair (Egano and Rottini) to enter into a debate about interpreting Scripture as the work of God or a human device.¹¹⁰ Without holding back, they both presented their best arguments of biblical exegesis and exchanged opinions on the meaning of the word ‘*Bara*, claiming [Egano] that this is not only only equivalent to the Latin word *creavit*, but also *produxit*, thereby wanting to demonstrate that God had been the author of the world, and not matter *ab aeterno*’. The debate went on at length, ‘moving from one subject to another’; they found some points of agreement but did not settle their differences on many issues.¹¹¹ Egano made a point of specifying to the Inquisitor that he had followed Rottini and ended up subscribing to some of his theories purely in order to obtain his trust so that he could expose him and his accomplices more effectively. There must have been quite a lot of ‘the elect’, as Rottini called them, judging by his words. He promised Egano that he would introduce them to him and above all ‘that he would take me to study in a beautiful library belonging to a hatter, a learned man who I have never met’. Therefore, Egano did not denounce them, either because of his commendable plan to infiltrate and crush an extremely dangerous group or because Rottini had procured Magalotti’s *Lettere famigliari* for him and it did not seem to be good manners to thank him by reporting him to the Inquisition.¹¹²

Handover

After considering the situation and reading the depositions from Vicenza, on 22 November 1740 the court ordered the Captain to arrest Bortolo and Rottini.¹¹³ A day later they were already being held in the Sant’Uffizio prison. The Captain’s search for them had not been hard; to use his words, he had simply picked them up from the ‘lay prison ... as they were handed over to me by the

¹¹⁰ Ibid., deposition by Camillo Egano to the Sant’Uffizio in Vicenza on 2 June 1739.

¹¹¹ Ibid., deposition by Balzi on 2 June 1739.

¹¹² ‘A book which as far as I can understand from going through the chapters is nothing but the refutation of atheism, and proof not only of the existence of God, but of the truth of our Catholic religion’, Egano hastened to point out: *ibid.*, deposition by Egano on 2 June 1739.

¹¹³ Ibid., session on 22 November 1740.

supreme authority'.¹¹⁴ For his part the Grand Captain, the head of police of the Consiglio di Dieci, told the Inquisitors of State that he had personally ordered for them to be taken from Camerotti prison and handed over to the custodian at the Sant'Uffizio prison.¹¹⁵ Regardless of these differences in perspective, it is sure that they were moved from one prison to another between 22 and 23 November.

On 9 April 1740 a document had been sent to the Sant'Uffizio signed by Giovan Battista Gradenigo, the Ducal Chancellor. It spoke about Bortolo and Rottini who, after being 'discovered to be guilty of despicable secret meetings and impious maxims', had been arrested and 'corrected'. They were 'also found guilty of heretical propositions and of possessing a large number of books by despicable authors which avowedly challenge the dogma of our holy faith'. Therefore, deserving a suitable punishment:

these points remain assigned to the Santo Uffizio dell'Inquisizione, so that with the assistance of the Savii all'Eresia and in accordance with the conventions and usual methods it can proceed in this respect against the above-mentioned Bartollemo Zorzi and Girollamo Ruttini. After they have finished their sentence, they can be handed over to the Santo Uffizio if requested.¹¹⁶

The 'supreme authority', from whose prisons the two had been transferred, indicated the Inquisitors of State, that is to say a magistracy that dealt with crimes of a certain importance, such as the formation of sects which presented a potential danger to public power. The government had certainly proved its promptness: the sentence in which it was decided to hand the two prisoners over to the Sant'Uffizio was approved on the same day, 9 April, after taking into consideration a document written by the Consultore in Iure, Fra' Paolo Celotti, a few days before on 4 April.¹¹⁷ The Ducal Secretary soon made contact with the Savi all'Eresia. The only thing left to do was to wait for the pair to serve out their

¹¹⁴ Ibid., session on 29 November 1740.

¹¹⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 671, report by Grand Capitan on 23 November 1740.

¹¹⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 143, trial against Bortolo Zorzi, written document dated 9 April 1740.

¹¹⁷ ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 53, 9 April 1740 and written document by Celotti of 4 April 1740. Even Celotti, who had always stood out in the tough battle against the Sant'Uffizio, had to conclude that there was no chance of a misunderstanding: on the basis of the *Capitolare dell'inquisizione*, the charges against Zorzi and Rottini deserved to be judged by the ecclesiastical authorities as well as their lay counterparts. On the important figure of Paolo Celotti, the Servite Consultore in Iure, see Paolo Preto, *ad vocem*, in *DBI*, and on his judicial background, concept of the state and convergence with Carlo Lodoli, see Barzazi, *Gli affanni dell'erudizione*, pp. 352–69.

sentence in the civil prison and then after a few months had elapsed they could move to the Church jail on 23 November. I will return to this point later.

Girolamo Rottini

Therefore, after having spent a couple of weeks reflecting in a cell, on 9 December 1740 Girolamo Rottini appeared before the Inquisitor. Tall and pale, the 36-year-old from Gandino near Bergamo had been living in Venice for a number of years, always staying in various inns: 'my profession – he said – is a proof-reader of books ... of printed copies of books, and a doctor'. He did not give any further information about his work, but described his education in quite meticulous detail after being encouraged to do so by the Inquisitor. He reassured the court that he had attended the school of Christian doctrine in Gandino, from which he had obtained 'first-class honours', before dedicating himself to the study of grammar, taught by priests. He then left Gandino for Bergamo, where he continued his studies with the Jesuits. After successfully completing his course, he moved to Padua to study medicine, 'a bit of philosophy and theology', but always 'with Catholic teachers'. He developed an interest in studying Scripture and *belles-lettres*, which then took him to Venice, where he settled in 1735. Here he had the opportunity to develop and display his talents by associating with a variety of people. As he explained: 'My congregations in Venice, and groups of friends, consist of different people, some noblemen and some clerics, and I also used to visit a *bottega* belonging to a hatter, called Bortolo Zorzi, whose *bottega* is in the Fava, and who lives in Sant'Aponale.'

Rottini knew perfectly well why he had been called to respond to the court. He said that the questions were identical to those that he had been asked in another court, clearly by the Inquisitors of State. Therefore, when he was asked what subjects he talked about with the people he associated with, he answered immediately that 'in the said *bottega* conversation sometimes turned to indifferent subjects, and sometimes to erudite matters'. Rottini had understood that they were interested in what happened inside the *bottega* and no advantages could be derived from trying to conceal things. The only possible line of defence lay not in denying that such meetings had taken place but in smoothing over their content, presenting them as a form of academic exercise. In this way, although the conversations might have touched on 'controversial theological matters regarding religion', perhaps 'about the controversy of the Roman pontiff and the relics of saints', they were, all things considered, polemical matters of little importance.

A few days later on 13 December he remembered some of the other issues discussed: the existence of purgatory, the effectiveness of the Eucharist and

penitence, the superiority of the pope over the Council, the creation of the world and the mortality of the soul. In general, however, he maintained the same line of defence, which was the only one available to him. When debating issues which could give rise to heterodox consequences, he claimed that he had always started by pointing out that he was speaking about philosophy and was treating God as 'being as such', 'irrespective' of the revealed God. It was probably in order to demonstrate this point that he tried to persuade the Inquisitor by launching into a long speech which was basically a broad summary of the first part of Spinoza's *Ethics*.

Among the habitués at the *bottega*, a good number of whom were secular priests, friars, noblemen and people from a wide range of socio-professional categories, he named Rupelli the librarian, Moncicò the Greek doctor, Stefano Balzi and a fat painter, Felice Petricini or Pedracini. The latter was not a completely new name to the Sant'Uffizio, but nobody remembered his fairly isolated appearance ten years previously. As we have already seen, the man in question was a pupil of the painter Sebastiano Ricci, who made a spontaneous appearance in 1730 to report the heretical discourses of a certain Abbot Cerutti, who denied the existence of hell and scorned the saints and the Catholic hierarchy. He took the opportunity to inform them that discussions which went against the faith were held at the *Vigilanza spezieria* under the Procuratie Nove. He also spoke of an attempt by Ricci to persuade him to read French 'good authors' featuring arguments which showed little respect for the teachings of the Church. Ricci owned a good number of them and would be quite willing to lend them to him. In order not to leave any doubt regarding the quality of the works and the issues addressed, he accompanied the offer by bemoaning the 'great abuse of the Church regarding the invocation of saints and praying to them, that one must not turn to them but only to God, because the saints can't do anything', and also denying the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Eucharist, underlining its commemorative and symbolic character.¹¹⁸ As he was a reader of Bernini,¹¹⁹ issues such as these must have stuck in his mind and might have influenced him, and indeed a few years later he went to look for them – the same or similar works – in Bortolo's *bottega*. It was at the *Vigilanza*, which he

¹¹⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 140, trial against Abbot Cerutti, spontaneous appearance by Felice Petricini on 6 July 1730.

¹¹⁹ This was probably Domenico Bernini, *L'istoria di tutte l'heresie descritta da Domenico Bernino alla santità di N.S. Clemente XI* (Venice: Presso Paolo Baglioni, 1711) or one of the many other works of ecclesiastical history in which Bernini distinguished himself. See Antonio Rotondò, *ad vocem*, in *DBI*.

had continued to patronize even though it was a den of impiety, that he met Rottini between 1738 and 1739, involved as ever in a philosophical debate.¹²⁰

The number of people involved was therefore growing. With all the habitués, casual visitors and curious onlookers that could overhear discussions in coffee houses, where Rottini said that a large part of the discussions were held,¹²¹ a large number of people came into contact with heterodox ideas. When filtered and presented using a vocabulary which was not always adequate, Spinoza's theories, for example, found an unexpectedly large audience.

The library

In the next interrogation on 15 December, Rottini introduced another central element of the affair: Bortolo's library. It was located in the hatter's house in Sant'Aponal and its richness had amazed even someone like Rottini, who frequently dealt with books through his job. It featured a wealth of texts, especially by French authors, including 'Pietro Bel's dictionary in which I read about ... the confutation of the two principles of the Manichaeists'. He became a fairly constant habitué together with other members of the group, who devoted themselves to a form of communal reading.¹²² The moment had arrived for the Sant'Uffizio to investigate.

On 10 January 1741 a list of the books found in the hatter's house was read out, which must have effectively only detailed the books deemed to be dangerous. It might have been a new list, even though one must have already been drawn up on the occasion of the trial that Zorzi and Rottini were subjected to by the Inquisitors of State during 1739. Among other things, the magistracy were particularly struck by the size and quality of the collection and their approach was influenced as a result. Even before the arrest it was known that Bortolo had 'books of all genres ... in great numbers', but after they were confiscated it was found that:

among these there are around seventy of the most damned type, as many of them teach the new doctrines of the moden heretics, challenge Catholic dogma, bear propositions that tend towards atheism, mock the sacred rites of the holy Church, question most of the articles of our faith and make the pontificate in

¹²⁰ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 143, trial against Bortolo Zorzi, Girolamo Rottini and Girolamo Zandini, defensive deposition by Felice Petricini on 10 December 1743.

¹²¹ Ibid., declaration by Girolamo Rottini on 13 December 1740.

¹²² Ibid., declaration by Rottini on 15 December 1740.

Rome loathsome. These are all books for which licences are not usually granted either for reading or possession.¹²³

These 71 titles spoke volumes about their owner's interests.¹²⁴ They were partly old editions and partly newly-published works which Bortolo had clearly been able to procure and which cannot have been in short supply in the Venetian market. The many pro-Reformation works such as *Apologia* and *Analysis dialectica colloquii Ratisbonensis* by Picenino and Bidembach's *Consensus iesuitarum* were kept alongside others deemed to be major vehicles of unbelief, like the works of Bayle, Marchetti's *Lucrezio* and Vanini's *De admirandis*. While works like Marino's *Adone* must have raised more limited concerns, the presence of *Opere* by Ferrante Pallavicino demonstrated the survival of libertine themes, in which it was possible to find inexpensive versions of polemics and disputes in basic vernacular form. The presence of *Kabbalah denudata* and *Steganographia* could have been due to the hatter's 'curiosity' or also due to an interest in magical-occult thought, which often ran parallel to philosophical reflection and unbelief. Texts like Burnet's *De statu mortuorum* questioned elements of dogma such as transubstantiation and, in Muratori's words 'if it does not remove the hope of Christians, it certainly unnerves it quite considerably'.¹²⁵ Other works such as Radicati's *Recueil* and Prynne's *Fulcimentum* used different approaches to attack not only dogma but also the historical figure of the Church. Elements of scandal were also provided by *La semplicità ingannata* by Suor Arcangela Tarabotti, while *Operum poeticorum* by Nicodemus Frischlin and *Conjectura de Gog et Magog* by Grotius both contained the image of the pope as the Antichrist. *Istoria del Concilio Tridentino* by Paolo Sarpi was a seditious book that launched a direct attack against the Church 'which shows all the artifice used by the Court of Rome to prevent the truth of dogma from being revealed, and that it was not about the reform of the papacy and the Church'.

Diodati's *Bible*, which excluded a few canonical books deemed to be apocryphal, provided a source to undertake a form of biblical exegesis, while the effects which Spinoza's *Tractatus* could have on a Catholic mind were devastating to say the least.

¹²³ ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 53, copy of written document by Consiglio di Dieci dated 25 September 1739.

¹²⁴ See the list in the Appendix.

¹²⁵ He also showed a certain degree of curiosity about Burnet's reputation in London, wondering if he was spoken about 'as an Anglican, Calvinist, or from the faction of unbelievers, which is growing there': Muratori, *Epistolario*, vol. 8, pp. 3255–6, letter 3392, to Giovan Giacomo Zamboni in London, dated Modena, 3 June 1734.

Other witnesses

On the day that the library was examined, another librarian, Don Giovanni Giacomo Rupelli, who worked for the Pisani di Santo Stefano family, was rightly called to give evidence. He lived in San Cancian and celebrated Mass in the church of San Fantin and in the ducal church of San Marco. He freely admitted that he had taken part in different discussions on a wide variety of matters, sometimes 'in a bookseller's *bottega*'. Upon reflection, he said that he had also sometimes been to Bortolo's *bottega*, where a small crowd gathered. The names he gave were already known from depositions by other witnesses, but were augmented by the name of a doctor, a certain Cappello who, along with Moncicò and Rottini, attested to the religious interests and concerns cultivated by scholars of medicine. There were also other noblemen and some anonymous clerics.

Bortolo in particular was interested in his work as a librarian: 'he asked me about certain books including some foreign ones, which came out from time to time, and some of which he showed me, wanting me to make some copies, and he talked about literary matters', as well as the philosophical systems of 'Neuithon, Cartesii, Gallileo and Gassendo'. In this way a kind of synergy was created between the libraries belonging to the Pisani family and Bortolo, despite Rupelli's repeated claims to the contrary. He said that he had been sought out to lend Spinoza's *Ethics* but had refused to do so. However, the fact was that handwritten copies of *Ethics* from the Ca' Pisani had started to circulate in keeping with the habitual strategy of the prohibited book market in Venice.¹²⁶

There was no further progress at this point until 9 March, when a letter from the Inquisitor in Padua was read out. On 24 January, 22-year-old Fra' Francesco from Venice, a professed clerk with the Capuchins, had appeared spontaneously to testify against Bortolo Zorzi and Girolamo Rottini. In his secular days he had been a regular visitor to the hatter's *bottega* and had associated with many of those who met there using the name Girolamo Biasetti. According to the Inquisitor in Padua, the accusations were extremely serious and further indepth investigations were necessary.

In 1737 Biasetti had been studying philosophy under the guidance of a canon from San Salvatore and, 'wanting to make the most of this science', he made friends with Rottini, who was probably already familiar to him. The latter told him about his social contacts and above all about Bortolo, 'who ... could enlighten me greatly in philosophical matters, as this man is well-versed in many sciences'. Their first conversations were about the keenly debated issue of empty

¹²⁶ Ibid., deposition by Giovan Domenico Rupelli on 10 January 1741.

space. They then moved on to astronomy. Fra' Francesco remembered that once he 'had discussed the star that appeared to the wise men, and posed a question, whether it was a newly-created star or one of the usual stars'. This was followed by more dangerous reasoning about topics such as purgatory, on which Bortolo 'quoted Saint Augustine', and finally the existence of God. The latter went on:

proposing reasons hinc inde, and developing the arguments, and then concluded that speaking as a philosopher there was no reason that could demonstrate the existence of God. However speaking as a Catholic, he said, it was necessary to confess that God existed. And on this matter he took a passage from Saint Paul: *accedentem ad Deum oportet credere quia est, et inquirentibus se remunerator sit.*

Rottini was no less vociferous as a tenacious opponent of the mysteries of faith. He stated his case by following Spinoza, who must have become the cornerstone of his thinking, and said that 'the texts of Scripture had to be interpreted in this or that way, and among other things while speaking about God he said: he gave this definition of himself: *ego sum qui sum*. What a wonderful definition'. He then returned to part of the libertine repertory, endorsing in particular the view of Moses as an impostor. Indeed, in his opinion Moses' books had not been inspired by God but 'written by him as if he were Him'. The miracles described therein were his inventions:

Manna did not fall from heaven miraculously, because even today in far-off countries, and I think he said in Poland, the same manna falls. When Moses pretended to climb the mountain to pray, he certainly did not go there to do this, but to observe when the water in the sea subsided in order to calculate the time for guiding the Jewish people to the other side on the dry sand.

Unlike Bortolo, Rottini did not even adopt the minimum precaution of 'raising a protest that he was speaking as a philosopher or something else'. This method of reasoning, which mixed elements from the erudite tradition with images taken from anti-Christian pamphlets, must have provided strong images which won him the latter's unconditional approval.

Rottini's fiercely anti-Catholic stance was clear when he asserted that 'our faith is not true, as there is no element which acknowledges it to be such', because although it could boast miracles and prophets, all the other religions also had them in abundance. The soul was seen as neither spiritual nor immortal, but rather 'the thought which is called the soul is created inside us from the union of limbs and the connection that our bodies make with the movement of matter'.

Although Biasetti protested that he did not want to hear such things because he was there to deepen his philosophical knowledge and not to question the faith with arguments which 'exceeded my intelligence', he stayed in touch with Rottini and the latter even visited him after he had entered a convent in Padua. It was May 1739 and Rottini arrived with some of his friends, who he called 'my metaphysical companions'.¹²⁷

After receiving the letter from Padua, the Sant'Uffizio decided to take further action. Zandini was summoned to appear on 9 March but did not. The Captain did not manage to find him and had to resort to a public summons¹²⁸ to achieve the desired results. On 14 March Zandini appeared before the Inquisitor once again to repeat what he knew.¹²⁹ The following week, on 21 March, it was the turn of another minor participant, the gazetteer Ponziano Conti, who worked as a *bottega* assistant for the merchant Cambiasio. He mainly confirmed the list of names already supplied by others, but was otherwise quite vague in his pronouncements. He only underlined the fact that, as far as he knew, Bortolo had a fairly well-stocked library and that in addition to philosophical matters he dedicated himself to 'news going around the city about the French and Germans, medicine and the secrets of medicine, and also Tasso'.¹³⁰

The repertory of interests shown by those who met at the hatter's *bottega* in the Fava was summarized by the issues they addressed: philosophy, religion, news, secrets and literature. This list was very similar to the range of interests that had been at the forefront of public attention for some time as a result of some striking cases. The Inquisitor probably had the impression that he was dealing with a Masonic lodge.

The 'free metaphysicians'

Rottini defined the people who accompanied him when he visited Fra' Francesco in Padua as his 'metaphysical companions'. On 2 June 1741, when he appeared at the Sant'Uffizio in Venice of his own accord to confirm and drive home what he had already declared to the Inquisitor in Padua, he was pressed on precisely this point. He recounted an episode which probably took place in 1739. He had been in the *bottega* together with Bortolo when a stranger came in to have his hat repaired. He asked the hatter:

¹²⁷ Ibid., spontaneous appearance by Fra' Francesco da Venezia at the Sant'Uffizio in Padua on 24 January 1741.

¹²⁸ Ibid., session on 9 March 1741.

¹²⁹ Ibid., deposition by Girolamo Zandini on 14 March 1741.

¹³⁰ Ibid., deposition by Ponziano Conti on 21 March 1741.

whether what they were saying around the city was true, namely that some heretics had been discovered in Florence who had given themselves the name Free Masons. The hatter answered this question by saying that it was true, then sympathizing with that gentleman about the spiritual misery of those heretics, they concluded that they would serve their punishment in purgatory or hell in the next world. Then the gentleman left.

After he had left, Bortolo commented: 'listen to him, these people believe that hell, purgatory and heaven exist'.

It is not clear why the stranger turned to Bortolo for information about Florentine Masons, but it is plausible that he was aware of the hatter's interests and the people who associated with him and so thought that he might be able to provide him with the relevant details. It is thus equally likely that the question was asked for provocative reasons or was posed innocuously in good faith. The fact remains, however, that Fra' Francesco explained matters in a way that established an implicit connection between 'Free Masons' and Bortolo's 'free metaphysicians'.

He added immediately afterwards, contradicting what had been said before, that those who went to the *bottega*:

had sworn not to speak about their opinions or make them public, they had given themselves the name Free metaphysicians ... Rottino said that he was a free metaphysician, and that the others were also called the same. As for me, I know that they called me a metaphysician, but I don't know if they called me free. They gave themselves this name because Rottini and Bortolo the hatter told me that a man with a free mind must be free, and not tie his intellect down to anything.

The picture was aggravated by the presence of a woman, a certain Giustina, who was also a member of the group of 'free metaphysicians'.

The anti-Masonic Papal Constitution *In eminenti* was issued on 28 April 1738.¹³¹ On 9 May 1739 the poet Tommaso Crudeli was arrested as part of

¹³¹ The decision to ban '*conventiculae seu societates vulgo dictae de Liberi muratori [...]* per apostolicam bullam' and '*non modo excommunicationis latae sententiae*' had been made during a meeting of the Sant'Uffizio on 26 March in the same year. On the same occasion a mandate was sent to the Consultori to draw up the text: ACDF, *S.O., Decreta 1738*, 26 March 1738, c. 150v. Strangely, the ambassador in Rome, Marco Foscarini, only warned the Senate about what was happening in the city on 7 June: 'as you know, in France they have uncovered the occult and unpredictable manoeuvring of that imaginary society that went by the name of Firmasson, or Free Masons. And as they discovered that in order to join this group one needed to subject oneself to indecent ceremonies, with suspicions of impiety, His

the suppression of the Florentine Lodge.¹³² On 28 May in the same year, in the midst of the controversy about the persecution of Masonry which had Europe-wide repercussions, Girolamo Zandini denounced Bortolo Zorzi and Girolamo Rottini to the Sant'Uffizio in Venice. As previously mentioned, they were both tried by the Consiglio di Dieci and the Inquisitors of State in April 1740 and were serving a sentence for having established 'despicable secret meetings' when they were transferred to the Sant'Uffizio prisons on 23 November later that year.

I am unable to provide the exact dates, but the investigations conducted by the Inquisitors of State definitely went on for a long time: on 25 September 1739, with most of the work concluded, the Consiglio di Dieci sent the Savi del Consiglio a document containing some information. The latter had to decide whether and to what extent it should be reported to the Senate. It was known:

from well-grounded reports that reached the Inquisitors of State, that a gathering of people was held in the hatter Bartolomeo Zorzi's bottega in the little calle on the way to the church of the fathers of the congregation of San Filippo Neri, known as the Fava. And that they have discussions, both about matters of faith and politics. Their [the Inquisitors of State] vigilance in increasing the holy precautions that they deemed opportune in their prudence was not in vain, necessary to achieve enlightenment to give a sound foundation to those decisions made necessary by the seriousness of the subject in question.

The surveillance work produced the desired results and in the end they managed to ascertain that Bortolo, 'eager to be seen as a learned man in holy and profane matters, tried to assemble people from every sphere, both clergy and laymen, and they had discussions about heretical opinions which they sometimes supported and sometimes refuted'. Some of the participants had withdrawn from the group and it was probably thanks to them that the authorities obtained further information, leading to the final decision to arrest the hatter and Girolamo Rottini, 'a doctor by profession, somewhat poor in means, equally witty, daring and reckless in the freedom with which he speaks and pronounces despicable

Holiness decided to issue an act of condemnation and to censure those who joined it': ASV, *Senato, Dispacci Roma*, f. 261, 7 June 1738, c. 24v.

¹³² On the Crudeli affair and the Florentine Lodge, see Franco Venturi, *Settecento riformatore* (5 vols, Turin: Einaudi, 1998), vol. 1, pp. 54–8; Francovich, *Storia della massoneria in Italia*, pp. 49–85 and more recently Maria A. Morelli Timpanaro, *Per Tommaso Crudeli nel 255° anniversario della morte, 1745–2000* (Florence: Olschki, 2000), with a selection of documents. See also Renato Pasta, 'Fermenti culturali e circoli massonici nella Toscana del Settecento', in Gian Mario Cazzaniga (ed.), *Storia d'Italia. Annali 21. La Massoneria* (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), pp. 447–83.

heretical positions'. Against both of them the Court had adopted 'a punishment reputed to be suitable for the purpose of breaking up these secret meetings', but now found it opportune for the Senate to reflect on the content of those 'highly despicable heretical propositions'. Considering that it was a question of faith and unbelief, the Sant'Uffizio should probably have been involved, given that the lay authority had already achieved its objective 'regarding the secret meetings ... and the freedom of speaking about political matters together with some wicked impious propositions'.¹³³ As we have seen, this reflection must have lasted for some time as the Pregadi only decided to hand the case over to the Savi all'Eresia in April 1740.

I feel that it is plausible to suppose that the wave of denunciations against them between the end of May and the beginning of June was due to a domino effect prompted by the start of the Inquisitors' proceedings. The stranger's visit to Bortolo's *bottega* to ask for information about the Florentine Masons must have taken place after 9 May, as mention was made of arrests and the first imprisonments in the city took place on that date. Therefore, the start of proceedings and probably also Bortolo and Rottini's arrest must have been before or, at most, at the same time as the denunciations to the Sant'Uffizio. It cannot be excluded either that the stranger who went to the hatter's *bottega* was an informer working for the Inquisitors of State; it was common practice for them to try to lure suspects into a trap in this way.¹³⁴ There is a note about Bortolo in the Inquisitors' papers: proceedings against him had been opened in 1739¹³⁵ and during his deposition on 28 May that year, Zandini reported with regard to the hatter that 'is now publicly said to have been imprisoned on order of the government'.¹³⁶ Therefore, Bortolo must have been arrested, probably together with Rottini, between 9 (although more probably a few days later) and 28 May 1739.

¹³³ ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 53, copy of a written document by the Consiglio di Dieci dated 25 September 1739. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Cecilia Stuart affair took place between December 1738 and the beginning of March 1739. It is possible that in some way the handover of Zorzi and Rottini to the Sant'Uffizio acted as a kind of political compensation for the favour obtained from resolving the Stuart episode peacefully.

¹³⁴ See, for example, the lively description in Freschot, *Nouvelle relation de la ville et république de Venise*, p. 376.

¹³⁵ ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 1256. The annotation '1739: Venice: against Bortolamio Zorzi, hatter' can be found on a long list of proceedings regarding the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It refers to a position in the old archive of the Inquisitors. The corresponding trial has been lost.

¹³⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 143, trial against Bortolo Zorzi, Girolamo Rottini and Girolamo Zandini, spontaneous appearance by Zandini on 28 May 1739.

The repercussions of events in Tuscany might have contributed to these decisions or accelerated them. As a result, Zandini and the other accusers must have panicked to a certain extent, probably preferring to sacrifice the two most recognizable figures for fear of potentially more widespread investigations. The Inquisitors' interest seems to have been moving in precisely that direction and we therefore perhaps need to reconsider the idea that the Papal Bulls *In eminenti* in 1738 and *Providas Romanorum Pontificum* in 1751 remained dead letters in Venice, where they were never actually published.¹³⁷ It is therefore plausible that groups such as Bortolo's, which in some way recalled the spectre of Masonry, were discreetly suppressed.¹³⁸

In general the climate was not especially favourable for the creation of heterodox groups, even if they were only vaguely inspired by Masonry. All over Europe and particularly in Paris, the beginning of the 1740s was marked by numerous arrests of Masons as part of a determined initiative to break up the lodges. This work was carried out by secular powers and was based on the view of Masonry as conspiratorial and subversive. It was still a new phenomenon, a model of aggregation which was still little known but nevertheless worrying.¹³⁹ While the essential danger to the Church was linked to the deist and atheist unrest that seemed to be spreading around lodges, a consequence of the fact

¹³⁷ Renata Targhetta, *La massoneria veneta dalle origini alla chiusura della logge (1729–1785)* (Udine: Del Bianco Editore, 1988), p. 23.

¹³⁸ This would corroborate the theory put forward by Findel and supported by Francovich, according to which the Venetian lodges, which emerged in around 1735, were hushed up following the Bull *In eminenti* and then secretly reinstated immediately afterwards. See Joseph G. Findel, *Histoire de la Franc-Maçonnerie depuis son origine jusqu'à nos jours* (2 vols, Paris: Librairie internationale, 1866), vol. 1, pp. 425–6; Francovich, *Storia della massoneria in Italia*, p. 132.

¹³⁹ Margaret C. Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in eighteenth-century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Conspiracy became the official interpretation in places that were hostile to Masonry. A particularly important example, in terms of the enormous number of anti-Masonic publications, books, pamphlets and newsletters, is the work of Abbot Augustin de Barruel, *Memoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme* (London, 1797), translated into a number of languages, including Italian (*Memorie per la storia del giacobinismo*, s.l., 1802). Barruel adopted the anti-Catholic and anti-ecclesiastical conspiracy theory by identifying Masonry as one of the immediate causes of the French Revolution. Barruel's idea corresponded to a widely held opinion and was the starting point for much anti-Masonic historiography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, influenced by its themes and readings. Furthermore, after it emerged, Masonry was linked not only to subversion but also to occult, esoteric and cabalistic themes, which constituted the other pole of anti-Masonic polemics, variously intertwined with the first. On these aspects, see Giuseppe Giarrizzo, *Massoneria e illuminismo nell'Europa del Settecento* (Venice: Marsilio, 1994), pp. 29–44.

that members of any religious faith were welcomed indifferently, the threats to the civil authorities lay elsewhere. They were organizations which had their own constitution, legislation, ties of affiliation and hierarchy which were not recognized by the official powers and were detached from them. They were organized as secret-meeting societies and were therefore subversive. However, this was not all: by welcoming members from different countries, lodges could become unofficial centres for diplomatic affairs or points of reference more or less knowingly inserted into spy networks.

James Anderson tried to give a soothing response to both these accusations through his *Constitutions of the Free Masons*. Between 1718 and 1723 the Presbyterian pastor dedicated himself to collecting the basics of Freemasonry on the basis of Operative Masonry texts. Published in 1723, the text became the official foundation of Masonry. Anderson underlined that a Mason would 'never be a stupid Atheist nor an irreligious Libertine', and established compliance with 'moral Law' as an obligation, along with 'that Religion in which all Men agree'. This natural religion consisted of being 'good Men and true, or Men of Honour and Honesty, by whatever Denominations or Persuasions they may be distinguish'd'. In this way, Anderson's reassurances ended up confirming the Church's concerns, as they opened the way to an agnostic form of Latitudinarianism and then to deism, given that he was basically speaking about 'natural religion'.¹⁴⁰

After all, by choosing the path of religious tolerance English Masonry had both accepted old Rosacrucian principles and taken stock of the political situation on the island with the contrast which saw the Stuart and Orange dynasties opposed. In this respect, lodges offered 'for the first time a concrete example of men from different faiths, united in the bond of brotherhood of the same syndicated discipline'.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, *Constitutions* declared that a true Mason should display the most absolute and devoted form of obedience towards civil powers. A 'Brother' who rebelled against the state could not be helped or supported. However, 'he may be pitied as an unhappy Man', without being expelled from the lodge.¹⁴² Reassurances of this kind were certainly not going

¹⁴⁰ *The Constitutions of the Free Masons. Containing the History, Charges, Regulations [...] of that Most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity. For the Use of the Lodges* (London: William Hunter, 1723) was reprinted and translated many times. The discussion about religion was also frequently tackled and resolved in a similar way by Bortolo's companions, but in terms which ranged from a more marked deist stress to decidedly atheist conclusions. This element might even have helped first the Inquisitors of State and then the Sant'Uffizio think of the threat of Masonic lodges.

¹⁴¹ Francovich, *Storia della massoneria in Italia*, p. 11.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

to win the favour of the authorities, who believed, as a Parisian police official said in 1744, that: 'Toute association, de quelque genre qu'elle soit est toujours dangereuse dans un Estate, et surtout quand on y met un Secret et une apparence de Religion, qui pourroit bien cacher beaucoup de libertinage.'¹⁴³

Although I do not intend to provide a summary of the history of Masonry here, it is now an established fact that the emergence of modern speculative Masonry dates back to the celebrated amalgamation of four London lodges in the foundation of the Grand Lodge of England on St John the Baptist's day in 1717.¹⁴⁴ The seventeenth-century precedents, which can be widely traced and connected to eighteenth-century Masonry with varying leaps of the imagination, were probably more closely connected to groups organized around the Rosacrucian model than to genuine Masonry.¹⁴⁵ From 1717 onwards lodges

¹⁴³ Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁴ There is a huge amount of historiography on the Masonic phenomenon. For an overview based on the most recent bibliography, I will just mention Antonio Trampus, *La massoneria nell'età moderna* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2001). An essential work about the situation in Italy is Francovich and now Cazzaniga. For a greater focus on the evolution of the phenomenon in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Aldo A. Mola, *Storia della Massoneria italiana dall'Unità alla Repubblica* (Milan: Bompiani, 1992) of which I used the 1999 edition. The Venetian episodes are accurately detailed in Targhetta, *La massoneria veneta* and in Franco Trentaforte, *Giurisdizionalismo illuminismo e massoneria nel tramonto della Repubblica veneta* (Venice: Deputazione di Storia patria per le Venezie, 1984). See also Piero Del Negro, 'La massoneria nella Repubblica di Venezia', in Cazzaniga (ed.), *Storia d'Italia. Annali 21. La Massoneria*, pp. 399–417.

¹⁴⁵ Groups of 'Free Masons' linked to the 'operative' Masonry of medieval guilds were definitely already active in the mid-seventeenth century in England and intersected with the work of the Royal Society. Robert Moray's membership of the Edinburgh Lodge in 1641 and Elias Ashmole's membership of the Warrington Lodge in 1647 are significant in this respect. Both Ashmole and Moray played a very active role in the formation of the Royal Society. On Ashmole's affiliations, see Conrad Hermann Josten, *Elias Ashmole (1617–1692). His Autobiographical and Historical Notes, His Correspondence, and Other Contemporary Sources Relating to his Life and Work* (5 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 33–5. On Moray's affiliations, see D.C. Martin, 'Sir Robert Moray', *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London*, 15 (1960): 239–50. There are two different approaches to the connections between this type of association and Masonry in Frances Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) and in Paul Arnold, *La Rose Croix et ses rapports avec la Franc-Maçonnerie. Essai de synthèse historique* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1970). On another level, there is an attempt to recover the mythical origins of Masonry in Arthur E. Waite, *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross* (London: Rider, 1924). I used the reprint by Kessinger Publishing, Montana (undated). For a general survey, see David Stevenson, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1590–1710* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and Margaret C. Jacob, *The Origins of Freemasonry: Facts and Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

spread all over Europe in the name of the Great Lodge in London and through the work of a wide range of people, including ambassadors, travellers, officials, sailors, merchants, noblemen, the middle class and intellectuals. They took in a high number of individuals who temporarily put aside their political and social roles when they joined so that they could become part of a group of 'Brothers' united and made equal by their affiliation, driven by curiosity and the desire to find places for free anti-conformist discussion and reflection.¹⁴⁶ By 1730 lodges were flourishing all over Europe.

Although lodges were in some way laboratories of democracy, they were not necessarily democratic structures. They played a fundamental role in creating a public space in which there were equal opportunities for dialogue and interaction between people from different social and cultural backgrounds, but had a hierarchical internal structure even though they were founded on supposedly meritocratic criteria. It is therefore difficult to establish exactly what eighteenth-century Masonry was, as its different branches shaped such a diverse range of groups. Masonry gradually took on occult connotations, which led to the High Degrees and Templar Masonry first in France and then in German territories, or rationalist content, which mainly took root in English-run lodges. In practice, contrasting tendencies often cohabited within individual Masonic groups at least temporarily. In essence, lodges mainly provided a meeting-place which was assigned a variety of sometimes incoherent meanings over time.

The simultaneous presence in Italy of leading figures from the Masonic world such André Michel Ramsay, Philip Wharton and Charles Radclyffe in around 1724 might have prompted the first genuinely Masonic unrest. In 1729 the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Howard, the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge in London, spent some time in Venice and other cities of the Republic, and it seems that his stay coincided with the foundation of the first lodges in the region.¹⁴⁷ At the time – although it is a weak indication – Montesquieu defined Scipione Maffei

¹⁴⁶ On this aspect, see Venturi, *Settecento riformatore*, pp. 54–5.

¹⁴⁷ On these matters in general, see Francovich, *Storia della massoneria in Italia*, pp. 22–41. On Ramsay in particular, author of the famous Oration in which he connected Masonry to the crusades, thereby founding the High Degrees by providing a chivalric line to oppose English Masonry, see the biographical profile in Kenneth R.H. Mackenzie, *The Royal Masonic Cyclopaedia* (London: J. Hogg, 1887), *ad vocem* and Marialuisa Baldi, *Philosophie et politique chez Andrew Michael Ramsay* (Paris: Champion, 2008). There is a good analysis of its importance in Franco Venturi, *Le origini dell'Enciclopedia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), pp. 16–26. On Howard, recently initiated into Masonry and already a Grand Master, see Bernard Fay, *La Massoneria e la rivoluzione intellettuale del XVIII secolo* (Turin: Einaudi, 1939), pp. 116–17, and Alec Mellor, *La charte inconnue de la franc-maçonnerie chrétienne* (Tours: Mame, 1965), pp. 42–3.

as the 'head of a sect'.¹⁴⁸ In the following years lodges were founded in Rome, Naples and, as previously mentioned, in Florence, the latter in either 1731 or 1732. Either connected to the French High Degrees or fellowships inspired by English Hanoverians, they won over 'Brothers' in every corner of Italy. It seems that Masonic groups sprung up more or less everywhere in Venice thanks to the work of figures like Abbots Antonio Conti and Antonio Nicolini, Francesco Algarotti and the previously mentioned Scipione Maffei, all associated with Masonry to a varying extent and members of different lodges, enjoying close relations with representatives from the Florentine Lodge. The following decades were characterized by the changing fortunes of these groups.¹⁴⁹

This setting dominated by the 'fog of Masonic prehistory'¹⁵⁰ in the Republic formed the backdrop for the tale of Bortolo the hatter's 'free metaphysicians'. Even in Venice Masons were becoming a fashionable phenomenon.¹⁵¹ In the rest of the city's territory the situation was not appreciably different; in as early as 1727 a play entitled *I Franchi muratori* was performed in Verona.¹⁵² The attention dedicated to the phenomenon did not decline in the following decades: copies of anti-Masonic books, which proved the existence of an audience curious about such issues, must have been widely available in Venice in the 1740s,¹⁵³ at exactly

¹⁴⁸ Montesquieu, *Viaggio in Italia*, p. 307.

¹⁴⁹ On these matters, which lie outside the events addressed here, and for biographical profiles of those involved, see the thorough analysis in Targhetta, *La massoneria veneta*, pp. 27–40, and the bibliography therein.

¹⁵⁰ The expression is from Francovich, *Storia della massoneria in Italia*, p. 134.

¹⁵¹ Gallo, 'La libera muratoria a Venezia nel Settecento'.

¹⁵² Targhetta, *La massoneria veneta*, p. 41.

¹⁵³ In two batches of books sent from Zurich to the Fontego dei Tedeschi in 1747 the customs auditor Marziale Righellini found 33 copies of a volume 'entitled: Les Francs Maçons, with new additions to the book regarding this institution', and reminded the Secretary of the Riformatori in a letter that it was a book 'presented to this Most Excellent magistrate on other occasions'. It was almost certainly *Les Francs-Maçons écrasés, suite du livre intitulé, l'Ordre des francs-maçons trahi*, published in Paris in 1747 with a false date in Amsterdam as a sequel to *L'Ordre des Francs-Maçons trahi et le secret des Mopses révélé*, which came out in Amsterdam in 1745 published by Jean Neaulme. They were immediately translated into German and then re-edited several times, issued under the pseudonyms Abbé Pérau and Abbé Larudan, although they were really the work of ex-Benedictine and librettist Giovanni Gualberto Bottarelli from Siena, who had escaped to Berlin in 1741 and was forced to lead a life of adventure travelling around Europe. These were among the first Masonic texts that led Masonry to be seen as a potentially seditious sect for political power: see Francovich, *Storia della massoneria in Italia*, pp. 114–17, and Trampus, *La massoneria nell'età moderna*, pp. 41–3. Along with these, a copy was also found of the two volumes of David Renaud Boullier, *Lettres sur les vrais principes de la religion où l'on examine un livre intitulé la religion essentielle a l'homme on y a joint une defense des pensées de Pascal contre la critique de Voltaire*

the same time that Casanova was probably doing a form of apprenticeship in Venice. Subsequently, between 1753 and 1754 two plays were written combining exculpatory and apologetic content: *Le donne curiose* by Goldoni and above all *I liberi muratori* by Francesco Grisellini.¹⁵⁴ In the meantime, one lodge had been set up in 1746 and another opened in 1752.

I am not trying to claim that the meetings which took place in Bortolo's *bottega* constituted a proper lodge. After all, as Giuseppe Giarrizzo noted, the Bull *In eminenti* did not so much precisely aim to combat Masonry as 'stop the spread of lay centres of libertine sociability, where the Masonic lodge is realistically identified as a model destined to meet with particular success'.¹⁵⁵ In 1737, a couple of years before the hatter's misadventures started, Lorenzo Diodati, an agent from Lucca in Florence, wrote that not much was known about the Florentine Lodge, but that he had heard it said about Masonry that:

when they tried to introduce it in Turin, it was discovered that they believed in the following three perverse principles: namely that having sexual relations with women was not a sin, that confession was not necessary, as repentance was sufficient to return to the grace of God, and that meat could be eaten on Friday and Saturday.¹⁵⁶

Tommaso Crudeli was convicted for having read Lucretius, *Vita di Sisto V* and a biography of Paolo Sarpi, for having also been ironic about the Sacred Heart of Jesus and finally for 'having attended a meeting where they spoke about

et trois lettres relatives à la philosophie de ce poète (Amsterdam: Jean Catuffe, 1741): ASV, *Riformatori dello Studio di Padova*, b. 372, note of 8 April 1747.

¹⁵⁴ Carlo Goldoni, 'Le donne curiose' was performed and met with reasonable success, unlike Grisellini's work which was never performed despite being reprinted four times: *I liberi muratori. Commedia di Ferling Isaac Crens, fratello operaio della loggia di Danzica, dedicata al celebre et illustre Signore Aldinoro Clog, autore comico prestantissimo. In Libertapoli. L'anno dell'era volgare mai no, e della ristaurazione della loggia sempre si*. Ferling Isaac Crens was an anagram of the author's name, Libertapoli stood for Venice, as did Danzica, while Aldinoro Clog was Goldoni. On Grisellini, see Ginafranco Torcellan in *Illuministi italiani* (7 vols, Milan: Ricciardi, 1965), vol. 7, pp. 93ff.; on Grisellini's relationship with Masonry, see Alessandra Di Ricco, 'Note su massoneria e teatro nel Settecento veneziano', *Rivista di letteratura italiana*, 8 (1990): 25–57. On the social and political context in which the two plays are positioned, see Piero Del Negro, 'Carlo Goldoni e la Massoneria veneziana', *Studi storici*, 2 (2002): 411–19.

¹⁵⁵ Giarrizzo, *Massoneria e illuminismo nell'Europa del Settecento*, p. 79.

¹⁵⁶ Quoted in Ferdinando Sbigoli, *Tommaso Crudeli e i primi framassoni in Firenze. Narrazione storica corredata di documenti inediti* (Milan: Battezzati, 1884), p. v, letter dated 16 June.

philosophy and theology and where various impious rites are observed and many heresies are taught'.¹⁵⁷ It is clear that the dominant themes in these descriptions were libertine in nature and in this respect Bortolo's sect also came close to the portrait of the Tuscan group put forward and could therefore equally be defined as Masonic.

In around 1710 a relatively similar group had been set up in the Hague by John Toland, attracting members such as Prosper Marchand, a journalist. This Dutch fellowship, the *Chevaliers de la Jubilation*, also made use of markedly Masonic terminology, but it was a group of libertines bound together in ideological terms by goliardery. Whether they were 'Masons or libertines' or 'Masons *and* libertines', the positions which marked the boundaries of the debate, the fact remains that the environment produced figures such as Jean Rousset de Missy, a diplomat, pantheist, contributor to the *Mercure historique et politique* and the future leader of Masonry in Amsterdam.¹⁵⁸

Associations of this kind must have been more common than it is possible to demonstrate using available sources. Freemasonry might have been a point of reference for the 'free metaphysicians', a field of action which was vaguely present in their definition of themselves as a group. The relatively slender number of participants in meetings was irrelevant, as only a few people were required for a lodge to be recognized as such. The social diversity that distinguished them was also noticeable in the first stages of Masonry, characterized by a strong degree of

¹⁵⁷ Francovich, *Storia della massoneria in Italia*, p. 83.

¹⁵⁸ This association was studied in depth in Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment*, which takes into account to a certain extent some criticisms directed at the previous *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons, and Republicans* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981), which nevertheless includes some useful documents in its appendix. According to the author, the fellowship was a pantheistic-republican-influenced minor alternative to the prevailing deistic-Newtonian component of English Masonry. See also Christiane Berkvens-Stevelinck, 'Les Chevaliers de la Jubilation: Maçonnerie ou libertinage? A propos de quelques publications de Margaret C. Jacob', *Quaerendo*, 13 (1983): 50–57. Jacob replies in 'The Knights of Jubilation-Masonic and Libertine', *Quaerendo*, 14 (1984): 63–75. According to Jacob, this group produced the famous work *Traité de trois imposteurs*. For a different interpretation, see Berti, 'Introduzione'. On the important figure of Marchand, see Christiane Berkvens-Stevelinck, *Prosper Marchand. La vie et l'oeuvre (1678–1756)* (Leiden and New York: Brill, 1987). For relations with Rousset de Missy, see *Le métier de journaliste au dix-huitième siècle. Correspondance entre Prosper Marchand, Jean Rousset de Missy et Lambert Ignace Douxfils*, Christiane Berkvens-Stevelinck (ed.) (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1993). On Jean Rousset and the restless environment of diplomacy, journalism and espionage that surrounded him, see Christiane Berkvens-Stevelinck, 'L'information politique dans les journaux de Rousset de Missy', in Duranton and Rétat (eds), *Gazettes et information politique sous l'Ancien Régime*, pp. 97–106. There is a useful introduction to Toland in Stephen H. Daniel, *John Toland: His Methods, Manners, and Mind* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984).

socio-professional differentiation within lodges: merchants, minor officials and actors alongside prelates of varying importance and noblemen under varying degrees of cover. In this respect the words of Anderson's *Constitutions*, according to which 'Masonry becomes the Center of Union, and the Means of conciliating true Friendship among Persons that must else have remain'd at a perpetual Distance', could also be applied to the 'free metaphysicians' to a certain extent.¹⁵⁹ Although it was only briefly hinted at, there was also a 'metaphysical' woman; although it was a rare occurrence, women were also accepted into lodges.¹⁶⁰ There was also evidence of the criterion of individual merit, which allowed Bortolo to assume the role of guide despite his position on the social scale. There were no ranks in the hatter's group, however, apart from a vague gradual progression on the basis of which one would be allowed to take part in discussions after giving proof of one's reliability. There was no ritualism, no Grand Master and there were not even any membership fees. Similarly, there were no positions as such or elections to fill them. The members did not want to be legislators or create constitutions, unlike certain lodges, especially those inspired by the English model. Furthermore, for what it might be worth, Bortolo's library did not have any books directly inspired by Masonry, which probably would not have been difficult to procure, and none of the participants in the meetings appear on the lists of Masons subsequently affiliated to lodges in the Venetian state. To sum up, the group lacked the institutionalized dimension typical of lodges which were directly inspired by the Masonic creed, something which Bortolo and his companions must have been aware of. Although the lay authorities must have been equally conscious of this, they did not want to run any risks. Therefore, on 25 September 1739 the Inquisitors of State sentenced Bortolo and Girolamo to a year's imprisonment.¹⁶¹

The hatter

There were two further interrogations in the summer of 1741; interviews were conducted with the doctor Giovanni Moncicò on 13 July and Rottini on 8 August. Neither occasion revealed much new information. Moncicò denied that he had ever heard religion being discussed in the *bottega* which, moreover,

¹⁵⁹ *The Constitutions*, p. 56.

¹⁶⁰ For this aspect, see Mola, *Storia della Massoneria italiana dall'Unità alla Repubblica*, pp. 40ff.

¹⁶¹ The date is taken from a note found in ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 532, c. 52v, 20 April 1740.

he had only visited occasionally just to say hello.¹⁶² Rottini continued the line of defence that had characterized his initial interrogations, defining himself as a 'Christian philosopher' and trying to tone down his stance as much as possible so that it would appear to lie within the confines of orthodoxy.¹⁶³

It was not until the following summer that the protagonists were back in the courtroom. In the meantime the Inquisitor focused on the books; in January 1742 he asked for a new inventory of Bortolo's forbidden library,¹⁶⁴ which might have been moved to the public library of San Marco by way of a Senate decree,¹⁶⁵ while in February the Cursore of the Sant'Uffizio went there to pick up two sacks of books. It is not clear whether these were Bortolo's books or corresponding copies for consultation.¹⁶⁶

Rottini was heard again at the beginning of July and on the 5th of the month he repeated the same lengthy defence. Five days later he admitted that during a discussion he had said that Moses' books had not been dictated by God. Bortolo had just 'responded suitably to the theories put forward by the author, who is called Spinoza, in his *Theological-Political Treatise*. I made a gift of my handwritten argument dictated to me by the theologian Father Leoni' to the hatter.¹⁶⁷ He appeared a further five times between then and 14 August. On this last occasion the Inquisitor tried to get to the heart of the matter of names they used to refer to each other, but Rottini did not fall into the trap and denied any form of self-awareness within the group as a sect or lodge.¹⁶⁸

By 23 August they had prepared a 'short censure of some books received during the course of the trial and found at Bortolo's house'.¹⁶⁹ On 6 September, nearly two years after being imprisoned, a tall pale man with black hair and a

¹⁶² ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 143, trial against Bortolo Zorzi, Girolamo Rottini and Girolamo Zandini, deposition by Giovanni Moncicò on 13 July 1741.

¹⁶³ Ibid., declaration by Rottini on 8 August 1741.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., session on 11 January 1742.

¹⁶⁵ This is how I have interpreted the written document which records the decisions made in the session on 11 January 1742. I did not manage to find the corresponding part in the Senate records. Nevertheless, an annotation in ASV, *Inquisitori di Stato*, b. 532, c. 52v, dated 20 April 1741, recalled that Bortolo's books were 'reserved to be moved to the public library'.

¹⁶⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 143, trial against Bortolo Zorzi, Girolamo Rottini and Girolamo Zandini, session on 27 February 1742, report by Cursore.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., declaration on 10 July 1742. Bortolo's reference was clearly to Chapter IX of *Tractatus*: Baruch Spinoza, *Trattato teologico-politico* (Turin: Einaudi, 1972), p. 261.

¹⁶⁸ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 143, trial against Bortolo Zorzi, Girolamo Rottini and Girolamo Zandini, declaration on 14 August 1742. He was heard on 5, 10, 12, 19 and 24 July and 9 and 14 August.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., session on 23 August 1742.

beard was taken from the patriarchal prison and brought before the court, where he declared: 'My name is Bortolo, son of the deceased Andrea Zorzi, I am Venetian, 55 years old, I am a hatter by profession, my house is in Sant'Aponal, and my *bottega* is in Calle dei Stagneri in the Fava.' He told the Inquisitor that he had followed the Christian doctrine in the church of Santa Maria Formosa since childhood. His father had been a gold-beater and Bortolo had worked with him in his *bottega* until he was 15, when he chose the profession of hat maker, working first with his uncle Pietro and then alone. In the meantime he had been taught by a priest from San Giovanni Crisostomo at a School of Grammar, and then dedicated himself to the study of philosophy under the guidance of a Neapolitan priest, Alessio Civilla, 'and attended to this at lunchtime'. 'I then saw to it that I learnt scholastic theology, with the support of Dominican friars from the monastery of San Giovanni e Paolo, in particular Fathers Andrea Chierichiel, Marco Venier, Master Bodignoni, Gasparini, Cagioli.' His education was therefore impeccable and characterized by extreme piety, borne out by his frequent associations with clerics up to the moment of his arrest.

Bortolo said that he knew he was 'currently' being imprisoned by order of the Sant'Uffizio, but obviously ignored the reason for this. Furthermore, in keeping with common practice he denied that he knew anyone who had questioned the faith in any way. He did admit, however, that he had owned some prohibited books, 'some of which I found by chance in the haberdashery street, and some at stalls around the city which I bought'.

Bortolo never said explicitly what the books represented to him, but he described them to the Inquisitor with such care and love that they almost came across as an extension of his personality. Culturally speaking he was quite shrewd. He had measured his system of thought against the official culture and to some extent he felt that he belonged to it. His books were the concrete tangible manifestation of this sense of belonging, as they had fuelled his reasoning to the point where he had become a point of reference for a sizeable group of people.

When the Inquisitor started to read out the list of books, Bortolo did not remember that he had owned some of them – although only a few, to be fair – but recalled others such as Bayle's works or Marchetti's *Lucrezio*, Radicati di Passerano's *Recueil* and Vanini's *De admirandis* extremely well, giving details of their binding and size and when he had bought them.¹⁷⁰ The interrogation on 11 September focused on Bortolo's books again, along the same lines as the previous one and indeed the successive one, which did not take place until 4 December. On this occasion he admitted that he had also owned the books

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., declaration on 6 September 1742.

that he had denied having in his first declaration. He was able to hold them for a moment to identify that they were his, and then said that he was willing to hear the 'censures' that the Consultori of the Sant'Uffizio had prepared on most of the titles.¹⁷¹

He must have thought – and it was a choice which was basically enforced – that the best strategy was to receive and accept the censures without raising any questions. His challenge was to present himself as a genuine Catholic who had only become interested in heterodox doctrines out of pure 'curiosity' or a polemical spirit. During his declarations on 4 December 1742 and 22 January 1743 he therefore adopted the technique of fully accepting what the Consultori had written about his books, passing it off as his own thinking.¹⁷²

As he explained on 24 January, the library was the result of a ten-year collection that he had gradually built up. He had bought his books separately 'depending on the opportunities and meetings that I had to buy them'. Significantly, the Inquisitor wanted to know which he had acquired first; he was probably trying to understand the hatter's heterodox journey and grasp its characteristics more effectively. However, either Bortolo could not remember or he preferred to conceal this information: 'I have never made an index about the time of purchase.' He could not even say that he had read them all. 'Depending on the opportunities' he had read some works, while he had only read parts of others. After all, his reading was primarily aimed at gaining exposure to certain ways of thinking and stimulating discussion; it was therefore a selective act focused on the issues at hand:

I remember reading some texts on the Works and the Dictionary of Bel [Bayle], and on the works of Brunet [Burnet], and equally the Canon, and Piccinin, and I also remember reading the Neapolitan Giulio Cesare Vanini. I may also have read and reflected on other works than those mentioned above, but I can't recall them now.

For example, he had never read *Sommario della dottrina christiana*, but had bought it and placed it together with the others.¹⁷³ He had only read the preface to *Historia et monumenta Joannis Hus atque Hieronymi Pragensis* and the

¹⁷¹ Ibid., declarations on 11 September and 4 December 1742.

¹⁷² Ibid., declaration on 22 January 1743.

¹⁷³ With regard to the *Sommario*, it was pointed out to him that there were some annotations in his hand on the last blank page in which he supported the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Although he could have exploited this to his advantage, Bortolo denied ever having read the book, not to mention having made notes in it: *ibid.*, declaration on 24 January 1743.

part about Hus' life, but not the section dedicated to his work. Similarly, he had only read the part of Twisse's *Vindiciae gratiae* about the dispute between the Jesuits and the Dominicans, the part of Marchetti's *Lucrezio* 'in which he refutes the homeomerics of Anaxagorus' and the part of *Disputationes historicae* 'where he speaks about Vanini, and in this way ... the information that he gives about Giordano Bruno'. With regard to *Ostensio historico teologica*, he had been attracted 'only to the historical part with regard to the book attributed to Charlemagne'. He had dedicated greater attention to Browne's *Religio medici*, 'which I read for its annotations, and in particular for the one in which it goes against those who say that the book *De tribus impostoribus* exists':

With regard to the book *Raccolta di passi curiosi sopra le materie più importanti* by Alberto Radicati, I confess that I read the part where it recounts that Machiavelli was granted a licence to print a dissertation on modern cannibals. This licence is in Latin, but as the rest of the book is in French I did not read anymore.

He had gone no further than the titles of *Analiysis dialectica colloquii Ratisbonensis* and *Consensus jesuitarum*, and had only read the title page of *L'impie convainçu* before dedicating himself to *Mercatus papisticus* on the same day that he bought it. He had paid attention to *Conjectura di Gog et Magog* 'to learn what is said about what can be read in ... *Revelation* about Gog and Magog' and had been directed to the Bible translated by Diodati from reading Picenino's *Apologia per i riformatori*, which cited it.¹⁷⁴

Bortolo's attitude to reading was thorough in its own way; he was meticulous with regard to certain themes and open to developing different approaches. He had not read everything by any means, but the pages which he focused on became an element of his thinking. This must have been enough for the Inquisitor to establish to what extent Bortolo had taken in the heterodox ideas he read and made them his own. There was a background of a long trial with different testimonies and probably also some informal interviews with the hatter himself. However, he needed to understand how Bortolo had been able to build up a library of this kind despite all the surveillance, censorship and prohibitions. The hatter's simple answers in his declaration on 29 January echoed the relative ease with which he had managed to do it. If he had been able to do it as an artisan with presumably somewhat limited financial possibilities, it would certainly present no difficulty to those who could invest more money in purchasing books. He had bought Bayle's *Dictionnaire* and *Oeuvres diverses* a few years previously from Giovan Battista Novello, who was then a *bottega* assistant

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

for the bookseller Giovan Battista Albrizzi and later became a bookseller and printer in his own right. He had accumulated the others gradually as explained previously. He might have acquired some from private individuals and some 'on haberdashers' counters and on stalls around the city. Some were also brought to me in the bottega, including some heretical ones'.

When he was unable to procure a book, as was the case with Spinoza's works, he could always count on the support of Don Rupelli, the librarian from Ca' Pisani. He also said that he had previously had another library of prohibited texts, but had disposed of them even though he possessed a licence to read them. The Inquisitor did not enquire any further, or his curiosity was not recorded, but it was clearly an element of some interest to know who had granted him this and to which works it applied. Bortolo had told the Inquisitors of State 'that he had obtained it in 1715 for three years, and it had been reconfirmed from time to time until 1737', although it did not cover a large number of the books he possessed, 'to which he pleaded guilty to owning'.¹⁷⁵ He must have had plenty of opportunities to provide himself with prohibited material; 'My *bottega* was open to everyone, and lots of different people came in, every sort of person. Those who stayed on to speak to me included regular and secular clerics, and also lay secular people and even some dressed as abbots.'¹⁷⁶

The picture he painted of the discussions was not very different from the one presented by the other witnesses. When questioned several times between February and March, he basically admitted everything that had emerged during the course of the trial. He naturally did so by specifying that the discussions had always been for philosophical purposes, underlining that for his part he had always supported the Catholic philosophers against the 'pagan philosophers, who believe that there are no natural reasons that can prove divine existence'.¹⁷⁷ Somewhat belatedly, on 26 March, he realized that it was better to point out that he had read the books referred to in the charges purely for theological purposes, as he had also read those by Catholic authors which disproved them.¹⁷⁸ On 30 April, when the Inquisitor was starting to show an interest in the matter of Freemasons, he said that he knew nothing about them and had never spoken about them.¹⁷⁹ On 7 May he asked to be able to defend himself and was granted

¹⁷⁵ ASV, *Senato, Deliberazioni Roma, Expulsis papalistis*, f. 53, copy of a written document by Consiglio di Dieci dated 25 September 1739.

¹⁷⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 143, trial against Bortolo Zorzi, Girolamo Rottini and Girolamo Zandini, declaration on 29 January 1743.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., declaration on 5 March 1743. He was interrogated on 5 and 7 February, 5, 7, 14, 21, 26 and 28 March, 30 April and 2 and 7 May 1743.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., declaration on del 26 March 1743.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., declaration on 30 April 1743.

his wish. He was assigned a lawyer, Giovanni Erizzo, who on 30 May presented the case for the defence, which essentially repeated the line adopted during the interrogations and reiterated that Bortolo had a licence to read prohibited books.¹⁸⁰

At the same time the Sant'Uffizio decided to hear Rottini again. The latter resorted to the usual strategy, pointing out that the same heretical arguments attributed to the prohibited books could also easily be found in the work of Catholic authors such as Segneri, Campanella and Magalotti.¹⁸¹ The records do not show whether the Inquisitor saw Campanella and Magalotti as champions of the faith or whether Rottini helped his case by mentioning them. Indeed, some reservations might have been raised at least with regard to the former. It would not have changed much anyway: on 16 May he was assigned the same lawyer as Bortolo and two weeks later on 30 May presented his defence brief together with the latter. They were practically identical and interchangeable with one another.¹⁸²

The outcome

In this way the trial wearily made its way towards a conclusion. Without showing any real diligence, the court dedicated the months from July to December to examining the witnesses for the defence, who naturally made a point of underlining the Christian probity of the two defendants. However, the latter still had to wait a long time for their sentences. On 14 April 1744 the Sant'Uffizio sentenced them to five years in prison, to be served starting from the date of their arrest. They were also warned not to engage in similar matters in future. A week later the sentences were read to Bortolo and Rottini and they abjured.¹⁸³ They were then taken back to prison.

As they had both been imprisoned in November 1740, they had to wait for another year and a half before being released. Nevertheless, the impression is that the Sant'Uffizio felt fairly satisfied with its work; it had successfully dismantled a well-structured and potentially dangerous group, one which was equipped with arguments and the ability to proselytize, a well-stocked library and a good level of enthusiasm. It was precisely this enthusiasm, however, which pushed it too far and triggered its demise. Whether or not they were Masons – and in the end everybody probably realized that they were not – the library had disappeared, and after the 'corrections' of the secular power it was difficult to

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., sessions on 7 and 30 May.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., declarations by Rottini on 9 and 14 May 1743.

¹⁸² Ibid., sessions on 16 and 30 May 1743.

¹⁸³ Ibid., sessions on 14 and 21 April 1743.

imagine that the sect would reform. The 'free metaphysicians' must have seemed like a closed chapter and so the five years of trials were deemed to have been adequate punishment. Therefore, in December 1744, when Bortolo and Rottini wrote a joint letter to the court asking for the few remaining months of their sentence to be remitted, nobody raised any objections. They were released on 22 December.¹⁸⁴

Twenty years later

I will ignore what subsequently happened to Bortolo. Naturally, this does not mean that nothing happened to him or that no records speak about it, but I have simply not been able to find them. Equally, with regard to the other 'free metaphysicians' there are only names and general indications of their ages and professions; the experience had probably taught them to be less conspicuous thereafter.

Only Rottini came to the attention of the Sant'Uffizio again in 1765. Not much had changed in the meantime. He still visited *spezierie* – but now he often went to the one in Sant'Aponal – and worked full-time as a doctor in the house of the Fantin Rota family. It was here that he had the opportunity to meet Don Cristoforo Venier, a regular visitor whose stance on matters of faith tied in precisely with his.¹⁸⁵ For his part Rottini had not changed his ideas much in the meantime. It was Don Bartolomeo Zender, a priest at the church of San Tomà, who told all this to the Inquisitor on 10 December 1765. Girolamo had clearly not stopped thinking about the things that used to be discussed in the *bottega* and his profession must have somehow helped to confirm his convictions. He said that 'doctors have little faith, because the more one studies nature, the less one believes', but was by no means the only one who thought like this. It was also a doctor, Antonio Pisani, who had tried to persuade Abbot Antonio Gavisini in 1736 'that man is no more than a pure machine and a pure mechanism', trying to 'destroy the point of the holy faith that teaches that there is an immortal principle or spirit in man, which is the reasonable soul'.¹⁸⁶ This opinion was also

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., session on 22 December 1744.

¹⁸⁵ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 148, trial against Cristoforo Venier. There are some references to the latter, the protagonist of a heated dispute with the journalist Elisabetta Caminer, in Catherine Samà, 'Verso un teatro moderno: la polemica tra Elisabetta Caminer e Carlo Gozzi', in Rita Unfer Lukoschik (ed.), *Elisabetta Caminer Turra (1751–96). Una letterata veneta verso l'Europa* (Verona: Essedue edizioni, 1998), pp. 63–79.

¹⁸⁶ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 142, trial against Antonio Pisani, deposition by Abbot Antonio Gavisini on 14 March 1737.

echoed in *Religio medici*, which was in Bortolo's library and which Girolamo had probably been able to read. In any case, on this line:

he then superimposed nature with God, saying that he cannot understand how this nature cannot be eternal, something which he found confirmed in the eternal generation of the Word, making a mockery of the theological distinction between the works of God *ab intra* and *ab extra*. From this matter he moved on to the Law of Moses, defining it as an imposture, saying that it was easy to impose oneself on an ignorant people and that he did not have contact with other peoples. It was not possible to have certainty about the miracles recounted in Exodus from other peoples. He greatly admired the wisdom of the Areopagites, and laughed just as much at Saint Paul's speech in the Areopagus, since having started speaking as a philosopher, adducing natural reason and the authority of poets, he had closed his speech with the revelation of the resurrection of the dead. He added that philosophy and theology are two songs which destroy each other in turn, and that the whole great machine of theology is destroyed by a single principle of philosophy.

Therefore, the years that had gone by since the first trial had not been totally wasted. There had been practically no change to the essence of his thinking, but he had learnt to make use of other arguments. Zender could not help being amazed by all this; without any hesitation Rottini said that he had spent five years in the Sant'Uffizio prison for the ideas that he had been brave enough to set forth. He had derived a general rule as a result: 'with regard to his belief he said: I believe not because I am right to believe, or because I've been persuaded to believe, but because I must believe'. He had thus started speaking openly again about matters which had caused him to suffer, trying to persuade others, offering to lend them books and proudly laying claim to the supreme legitimacy of his revelation.

He must have felt that the trial and the years spent in prison were a distant memory and that he had been punished enough, thereby authorizing him to express himself freely again. After all, he was nothing if not coherent. As he himself said, 'the justice of God is repelled by punishing the sins of men with eternal sentences'.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ ASV, *Sant'Uffizio*, b. 148, Don Francesco Murer file, trial against Girolamo Rottini, spontaneous appearance by Don Bartolomeo Zender on 10 December 1765. On 23 January 1766 another witness was heard, Don Pietro Valentini, who was also a priest at San Pantalon, but, as was the custom, the proceedings were interrupted at this point.

Appendix

Bortolo Zorzi's Prohibited Library

I have maintained the order of the catalogue in listing the titles, which should correspond to the way the books were arranged in Bortolo's library. The catalogue listed the title, sometimes the author and year of the edition and often the place where it was printed. I have managed to identify most of the editions and, whenever possible, I have added the name of the printer and indicated whether the editions I found were different from those in the catalogue.

1. *La Sacra Bibbia tradotta in lingua italiana da Giovanni Diodati, seconda editione migliorata, ed accresciuta. Con l'aggiunta de' Sacri Salmi*, Chovët, Geneva, 1641
2. William Twisse, *Vindiciae gratiae, potestatis ac providentiae Dei, hoc est, ad examen libelli Perkinsiani De praedestinationis modo et ordine, institutum a Iacobo Arminio, responsio scholastica, tribus libris absoluta. Una cum digressionibus ad singulas partes accommodatis; in quibus illustriores in hoc negotio quaestiones fusius pertractantur et accurate discutiuntur, veritasque adversus Bellarminum, Didacum Alvarez, Gabrielem Vasquez aliosque tum Papistas tum Pelagianos, asseritur; nec non opiniones nonnullae quorundam modernorum theologorum modeste examinantur. Auctore Guilielmo Twisso*, editio ultima, Amstelodami apud Joannem Janssonium, 1648
3. [Paolo Sarpi], *Historia del Concilio tridentino. Nella quale si scoprono tutti gl'artificii della Corte di Roma, per impedire che ne la verita di dogmi si palesasse, ne la riforma del papato, et della Chiesa si trattasse. Di Pietro Soave polano*, in Londra, appresso Giovanni Billio, Regio stampatore, 1619
4. *Historia et monumenta Joannis Hus atque Hieronymi Pragensis [...] cum [...] scriptis et testimoniis multorum [...] qui [...] suppliciorum istorum spectatores fuerunt. Accessere huic editioni indices novi [...] recensita omnia juxta antiquam anni MDLVIII editionem norimbergensem Joannis Montani et Ulrici Neuberi*, 1715, 2 vols
5. Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique, par Monsieur Bayle*, troisième édition, P. Brunel et al., Amsterdam 1730, 4 vols

6. Pierre Bayle, *Oeuvres diverses de Monsieur Pierre Bayle, professeur en philosophie et en histoire à Rotterdam*, P. Husson et al., à La Haye 1727-1731, 4. vols¹
7. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il Decamerone di M. Giovanni Boccaccio, nuovamente corretto et con diligentia stampato MDXXVII*, Impresso in Firenze per li heredi di Filippo di Giunta nell' anno del Signore MDXXVII, a dì xiiij del mese d'aprile
8. Giacomo Picenino, *Apologia per i Reformatori e per la religione riformata contro le invettive di F. Panigarola e P. Segneri*, Smid, Coira, 1706
9. Blaise Pascal, *Les provinciales ou Lettres escrites par Louis de Montalte, a un provincial de ses amis et aux RR. PP. Jesuites, sur la morale et la politique de ces peres; traduites en latin par Guillaume Wendrock, theologien de Saltzbourg. En espagnol par le Sr. Gratien Cordero, de Burgos. Et en italien par le Sr. Cosimo Brunetti, Gentil-homme Florentin*, A Cologne chez Balthasar Winfelt, 1684
10. *Discursus Theologicus et politicus circa Bullam meditatam ab Innocentio XI. Adversus nepotismum directus ad summum Pontificem et ad eminentissimos Cardinales*, Coloniae [S.n.], 1688
11. Marcantonio Marcello, *De Jure saeculari romanorum pontificum M. Antonii Marcelli, [...] liber, cui adjectus [...] discursus contra elationem et potestatem temporalem Papae [...]* Francofurti, J. Beyerus, 1627
12. Wilhelm Bidembach, *Consensus Jesuitarum et christianorum in Doctrina religionis [...] ubi examinantur propositiones Confessionis Augustiniana [...]*, Tubinga [S.n.], 1568
13. Thomas Browne, *Religio medici, auctore T. Browne, ab anglica lingua in latinam versa a J. Merryweather, cum annotationibus*, Argentorati, sumptibus F. Spoor, 1677
14. Alberto Radicati di Passerano, *Recueil de pieces curieuses sur les matieres les plus interessantes. Par Albert Radicati*, A Rotterdam, chez la veuve Thomas Johnson et fils, 1736
15. Jenkins Thomas Philipps, *Dissertationes historicae quatuor, I. De Atheismo, sive Historia atheismi [...] II. De Papatu. III. De Origine et progressu christianae religionis apud Britannos. IV. De Regimine ecclesiae St. Gallensis in Helvetia [...]* Auctore J. T. Philipps, London, impensis G. Meadows, 1735

¹ The inventory states La Haye (The Hague), 1717. This could be a copying error, as there are no records of editions before 1727, apart from volume 1 and the first part of volume 2, published in 1725 and then republished in the complete edition in 1727. It is unlikely to have been the 1737 unauthorized edition, again published in La Haye, because the work must have already been in Bortolo's library by then. Therefore, I think it must have been La Haye, 1727.

16. Valeriano Magni, *Concussio fundamentorum Ecclesiae Catholicae, iactata ab Hermanno Conringio examinata, et retorta in A catholicos a Valeriano Magno Fratre Capuccino [...]*, Straubinga, Gallus, 1654
17. *Sommario de la religion christiana, raccolto in dieci libri, ne' quali si tratta di tutti gli articoli della fede, secondo la pura parola di Dio*, stampatto in Roma [ma Ginevra], da Paolo Gigliodoro, 1590
18. Lambert Daneau, *Ethica christiana libri tres. In quibus de veris Humanarum actionum principiis agitur*, Genevae, [Vignon ?], 1557²
19. Samuel Von Pufendorf, *Jus feciale divinum, sive de consensu et dissensu Protestantium exercitatio posthuma*, Lubecae, 1695
20. Renato Valle [pseud. di Théophile Raynaud], *Hipparchus; de religioso negotiatore disceptatio, Mediastinum inter ac Timotheum, quae negotiatio a religioso statu abhorreat, lucubratio Renati a Valle*, Francopoli, apud P. Salvianum, 1642
21. William Prynne, *Fulcimentum gladii christianorum regum, principum et magistratuum: quo ipsorum haereticos, idololatrias, schismaticos, sectarum authores et blasphemos, pro criminis gravitate puniendi authoritas, jus, ac potestas testimoniis veteris et novi testamenti, edictis et praxi christianorum imperatorum [...] latino donatum a Wolgango Meyero*, [no place], [no name], 1649
22. *Intrichi del nostro tempo overo exceptioni politiche contro le regole evangeliche, autore vox populi, dedicato a giusto, e pastore*, [no place], [no name], 1660 circa
23. [Jean François Baltus], *Historia de silentio oraculorum Paganismi, post D. N. Jesu Christi adventum obmutescentium contra D. Van-Dale, anabaptistam Batavum, eiusque defensorem D. de Fontenelle ad Verbi incarnati maiorem gloriam et catholicae veritatis ab ecclesia et Ss.patribus constanter assertae confirmationem propugnata; e Gallico Latine reddita*, [Würzburg], typis Engmannianis, 1725
24. Alfonso de Valdés, *Due dialoghi, l'uno di Mercurio et Caronte nel quale, oltre molte cose belle, gratiose et di buona dottrina, si racconta quel che accade nella guerra dopo l'anno MDXXI, l'altro di Lattantio et di uno archidiacono, nel quale puntalmente si trattano le cose avvenute in Roma nell'anno MDXXVII. Di spagnuolo in italiano con molta accuratezza et tradotti, et revisti*, In Vinegia [undated]

² The oldest edition that I have been able to find is the second, from 1579.

25. *Prediche di Fra' Girolamo da Ferrara sopra Ezechiele*, 1541³
26. Charles-Claude Genest, *Principes de philosophie, ou Preuves naturelles de l'existence de Dieu et de l'immortalité de l'âme*, par M. l'abbé Genest, Amsterdam, E. Du Villard, 1717
27. Giovan Battista Marino, *L'Adone, poema del cavalier Marino. Con gli argomenti del conte Fortuniano Sanvitale, e l'allegorie di don Lorenzo Scoto. Aggiuntovi la tavola delle cose notabili, con le Lettere del medesimo cavaliere*, in Amsterdamo, 1679, 2 vols
28. Thomas Burnet, *De statu mortuorum, et resurgentium*, Londini 1726, 3 copies
29. Tito Lucrezio Caro, *Di Tito Lucrezio Caro Della natura delle cose libri sei. Tradotti da Alessandro Marchetti lettore di filosofia e matematiche nell'universita di Pisa et accademico della Crusca*, Londra, per Giovanni Pickard, 1717
30. Carlo Visconti, *Lettres anecdotes et memoires historiques du nonce Visconti, Cardinal Preconise, et ministre secret de Pie IV et de ses creatures, au Concile de Trente. Dont plusieurs intrigues inouies se trouvent dans ces relations, mises au jour, en Italien et en Francois par Mr. Aymon, [...] Divisees en deux parties*, A Amsterdam, chez les Freres Wetstein, 1719, 2 vols
31. [Noël Aubert de Versé], *L'Impie Convaincu, Ou Dissertation Contre Spinosa. Dans laquelle l'on refute les fondemens de son Atheisme. L'on trouvera dans cet Ouvrage non seulement la refutation des Maximes impies de Spinosa, mais aussi celle des principales hypotheses du Cartesianisme, que l'on fait voir être l'origine du Spinosisme*, Crelle, Amsterdam, 1685
32. Adam Contzen, *Disceptatio de secretis Societatis Iesu, inter Ioannem canonicum Vratislaviensem, Ludovicum iurisconsultum Brandenburgicum, Moguntiae*, Wolter, 1617
33. [Hugo Grotius], *Conjectura de Gog et Magog ad Ezechielis 38-39*, [no place], 1645
34. Erasme Albère, *L'Alcoran des Cordeliers tant en latin qu'en françois, c'est-à-dire recueil des plus notables bourdes et blasphèmes de ceux qui ont osé comparer saint François à Jésus-Christ, tiré du grand livre des conformitez jadis composé par frère Barthelemi de Pise, cordelier en son vivant. Nouvelle*

³ I have not managed to identify the edition. The nearest one is Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche del reverendo padre fra Girolamo Sauonarola da Ferrara, sopra il salmo Quam bonus Israel Deus, predicate in Firenze, in santa Maria del Fiore in uno aduento, nel 1493 dal medesimo poi in Latina raccolte. Et da fra Girolamo Giannotti da Pistoia in lingua uolgare tradotte; Et da molti eccellentissimi huomini diligentemente reuiste et emendate, et in lingua Toscha impresse*, [Printed in Vinegia (Venice)], [For Bernardino de Bindoni Milanese], MDXXXIII.

édition ornée de figures dessinées par B. Picart, Amsterdam, aux dépens de la Compagnie, 1734

35. Christian Nifanius, *Ostensio historico-theologica, quod gloriosiss. Imperator Carolus M. in quamplurimis fidei articulis formaliter non fuerit papista consignata à Christiano Nifanio, SS. Theol. Licentiato, Superintendente, ac Consistoriali Ravensbergico, Francofurti, apud Wilhelm. Reich, Stockium, 1670*
36. Johann Carion, *Chronicon Carionis: expositum et auctum multis et veteribus et recentibus historiis in descriptionibus reghorum et gentium [...] ab exordio mundi usque ad Carolum V imperatorem; Recens vero summo studio adornatum [...] A Philippo Melanthere et Casparo Peucero, Francofurti, Tampach, 1624*
37. Jacques Boutreux d'Estiau, *Della sovrana giurisdittione de' Re sopra la politia della Chiesa. Contro le massime tenute da Mons. Vescovo d'Angiers, nella controversia tra lui ed il capitolo della chiesa cattedrale, dal francese tradotto nell'italiano, Parigi, della stamperia di P. Durando, 1625*
38. Louis Maimbourg, *Histoire du pontificat de Saint Leon le Grand par Monsr. Maimbourg, La Haye, Moetjens, 1687*
39. Louis Maimbourg, *Traité historique de l'établissement et des prérogatives de l'Eglise de Rome et des ses évêques, par monsieur Maimbourg, Paris, Sebastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1685*
40. Basilio de Varna, *Analysis dialectica colloquii Ratisbonensis anno 1601 de norma et iudice omnium controversiarum fidei christianae habiti. Cum collationes relationis Adami Tanneri, et responsi Jacobi Gretseri and theses D. Aegidii Hunnii de colloquio ineundo, partibus duabus comprehensa, Francofurti, Typis Joannis Saurii, impensis Petri Kopffii, 1602*
41. Johannes Trithemius, *Johannis Trithemii Steganographia: nunc tandem vindicata reserata et illustrata ubi post vindicias Trithemii [...] explicantur coniurationes spirituum [...] deinde solvuntur et exhibentur artificia nova steganographica authore Wolfgango Ernesto Heidel, Norimbergae, Rudiger, 1721*
42. Johannes de Mey, *Commentaria physica, sive, Expositio aliquot locorum Pentateuchi Mosaici in quibus agitur de rebus naturalibus, quorum indicem sequenti tabula exhibuimus. Conscriptae a Johanne de Mey ecclesiaste Medioburgensi, Medioburgi, Apud Jacobum Fierensium, anno 1651*
43. *Mercatus papisticus a M.M D., Hanovie, 1618⁴*
44. Pacificus a Lapide [pseud. di Christoph Rapp], *Homo politicus hoc est Consiliarius novus, officarius et aulicus, secundum hodiernam praxin [...]*

⁴ Unidentified.

- auctore Pacifico a Lapide, editio secunda [...] cui accesserunt Monita privata Societatis Jesu, Cosmopoli, 1668*
45. [Christian Knorr von Rosenroth], *Kabbala denudata, seu Doctrina Hebraeorum transcendentalis et metaphysica [...] Kabbalae denudatae tomus secundus, id est liber Sohar restitutus*, Sulzbaci (Francofurti) 1677-1684
 46. Jeremias Friedrich Reuss, *Iustae vindiciae thesium quorundam cum aphorismis de cultu Dei*, Hafniae, 1735
 47. Giulio Cesare Vanini, *De Admirandis naturae reginae deaeque mortalium arcanis libri quatuor*, Lutetiae, apud A. Perier, 1616
 48. [August Christoph Wilke], *Theologia in speculo, seu definitionis theologiae dogmaticae*, Lipsia, 1709⁵
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⁵ Unidentified. I think that the author listed in the catalogue, 'Christophori Wilki', is August Christoph Wilke, the author of *Dissertatio inauguralis iuridica de causis contractum perfectum rescindentibus*, Altorfium, Meyer, 1740.

⁶ This edition corresponds to the information in the catalogue except for the year, 1681. I have not been able to find the 1680 edition, which perhaps does not exist. Not to be confused with Paul Höhn, *Corvus hians delusus, sive de Non speranda nova monarchia oratio recitata [...] a Paulo Hönn [...]* (Noribergae: Typis W. Endteri, 1642).

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⁷ The date 1642 is listed in the catalogue. However, this refers to an edition that I have not been able to identify.

difficultatem aliquam habent breviter explicantur; sed loca etiam quae de Plauti et Terentij fabulis expressit Frischlinus, accurate annotantur et evolvuntur, Argentorati, apud Johannem Carolum, 1621

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⁸ The catalogue refers to a 1665 Verona edition which I have not traced.

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